



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

*The
Hope
Chest*



Mark Lee Luther

Helen Waldo Mitchell

235 Embarcadero Road

Palo Alto, California

From the Library of

J. Pearce Mitchell



**STANFORD
UNIVERSITY
LIBRARIES**

1

2

3

4

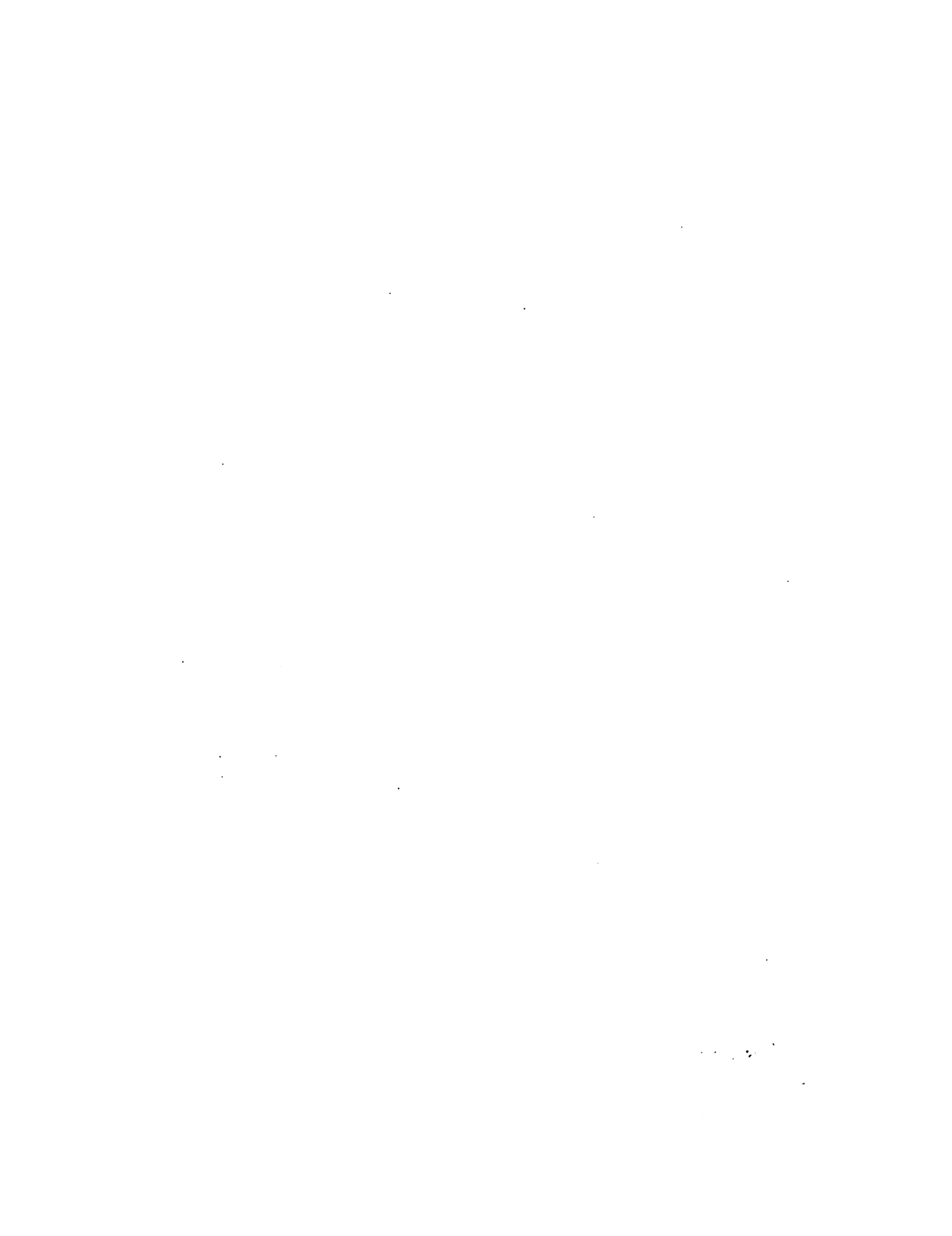
5

6

7

8

9





“WHAT DOES IT SAY?” HE ASKED, IMPROVING THE CHANCE FOR A CLOSE APPROACH.

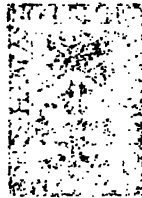
FRONTISPIECE. *See Page 312.*

THE HOPE CHILD

BY

JANE LEE MITCHELL

ILLUSTRATED BY
JAMES MONTGOMERY FLINT



BOSTON

WELLS, BROWN, AND COMPANY

1916



THE HOPE CHEST

BY

MARK LEE LUTHER

WITH FRONTISPIECE BY

JAMES MONTGOMERY FLAGG



BOSTON

LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY

1918

PS 3723
U 6346

Copyright, 1918,
BY LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY.

All rights reserved

Published, February, 1918
Reprinted, February, 1918

Norwood Press
Set up and electrotyped by J. S. Cushing Co., Norwood, Mass., U.S.A.

TO
HOMER JEROME LUTHER

THE HOPE CHEST

CHAPTER ONE

As everybody knows, the girls employed by Ballantine and Hoyt in their great chain of candy stores are distinguished for their good looks. This was a hobby of Roger Ballantine, founder of the firm, and he was said to ride it nearly as hard as the hobby-riding king who collected giant soldiers. Certainly the local managers were careful in their recruiting. Those in college towns and watering places had to be particularly alert, and the expert in charge of "The B & H Sweetshop" in Atlantic City therefore paid Sheila Moore a magnificent tribute when he remarked that she was the prettiest girl who ever handed a box of chocolates across his counters.

But Tom Ballantine went even farther. In his opinion she outclassed the entire "B & H" cohorts. He knew. He had seen them all. During the summer now gliding swiftly into autumn he had inspected every link in the chain of sweetshops. It was his father's idea of a vacation. He himself made the grand tour of his branches when he felt the need of change. Young Ballantine would have chosen another form of relaxation from the labors of his Harvard year, but on the whole the pilgrimage had not been tedious. Instructed to show him every-

thing, most of the local managers had broadly interpreted this to include the town, and, till he reached Atlantic City, his studies were varied. He then decided it was time to specialize. It was the candy business he had in mind, but his specialty turned out to be Sheila Moore.

On a certain forenoon in September, which had dawned deceptively bright, Sheila darkened the day for the manager by telephoning her resignation. It seemed that she was going away. She hated to leave him in the lurch, she said, but something — oh, very important — had come up suddenly, and she hoped he'd understand. He did not. Young Mr. Ballantine, sauntering in shortly after, listened to the news with every mark of sympathy. He agreed that her loss was a disaster of the first magnitude and voiced his regret that he could not help to pick her successor. But it appeared that he also was leaving town. It was a personal matter which no one could attend to but himself. He then took the local manager out to lunch and strove to raise his spirits. They had broiled lobster and other things.

Sheila lunched on a cheese sandwich and a lemon phosphate at the soda fountain nearest her hall bedroom and returned without a pang of indigestion to her packing. She was only eighteen. But if her body was at peace, her mind obviously was not, and, kneeling before her trunk, her hands would every now and then fall idle and her eyes go questing into far spaces. The packing at an end, she put on a suit of dark blue serge and a quiet little hat with a jaunty little quill and issued, a gloriously youthful and vividly

pretty figure, into a street which led through shabbiness to splendor on its way to the sea. The nearer she drew to the Board Walk, the more laggard became her step, and the rolling chair fraternity made confident bids for her patronage. Once on the promenade, however, she gripped her courage afresh and walked briskly till she reached the entrance of a theater which the billboards asserted was the home of supreme motion pictures and refined vaudeville.

Violent posters of the silent drama and framed photographs of the week's vaudeville flanked the shallow lobby and, after a glance at a pier clock, Sheila drifted to an easel dedicated to the renown of one Lew Pam and his Six Rosebuds. The faces of the "buds" were ingeniously set about with petals. All were comely, and two might have met the exacting test of Ballantine and Hoyt. The features of Mr. Pam were nearly lost in the stock disguise of the German comedian, but he had a whimsical eye that was not in the least Teutonic. He looked directly out of the photograph, and Sheila, with her lovely color heightened, gave him gaze for gaze. So rapt was she in her musing, she took no heed of the original till he touched her arm.

"What's wrong, Sheila?" he asked.

She started and flushed a still livelier pink.

"I was just going to ask when your act came on," she explained breathlessly.

"Not for an hour," he said. "But how did you break away from work? You don't look sick."

"I'm not sick."

"Sacked?"

"No, no. And nothing is really wrong. But I

couldn't wait for you to look me up. You see I — but we can't talk here."

He nodded and led the way down a flight of steps to the beach and they dropped in the sand underneath a pier. Without his grotesque make-up, he showed for a clean-shaven man of the late forties, with the grave lines which in the general irony of things tend to sadden the face of the jester. Side by side with him, one readily saw where the girl got her blue-gray eyes. And hers, too, were whimsical.

"Out with it now," he commanded in mock sternness.

Sheila tried to smile.

"Daddy Joe —" she began and ended.

"Take your time if it's so serious," he said, reaching for her hand.

Her look fluttered seaward and then came darting round to meet his.

"I'm married," she announced.

His fingers closed over hers in a grip that made her wince.

"Married!" he repeated dully. "Did I get that straight?"

"Yes," she said with what voice she could muster.

"It's true, Daddy Joe. I was married this morning."

"You — my little Sheila!" Then, turning an angry red, "Who is the damned sneak?" he demanded.

"Where is he?"

She snatched her hand away.

"You shan't call my husband names," she declared.

"He isn't a sneak. He's a gentleman. I won't let anybody run him down — anybody! He's my husband."

He blinked at her fiery championship.

"If he's on the level, as you say, why didn't he wait for me to get here?"

"He didn't know —"

"You knew. I wrote you a month ago that I was booked here. And you must have seen the ads. It couldn't have gone out of your head that I was due to-day."

"No," she admitted. "I didn't forget."

"And yet you went straight ahead!"

"I was afraid you'd try to stop me."

"Do you call that giving me a square deal?"

"No." She shook her head. "But I didn't dare take the risk. I can't live without Tom. Don't you understand? Of course you do. You ran off with mother."

"That was because her gov'ner couldn't get it through his thick head that I — that we —" He caught himself up and smiled.

"You see!" She moved closer and snuggled their reunited hands into the soft sand.

"I see," he said. "What is Friend Husband's other name?"

"Ballantine."

Her father's mouth and eyes opened in perfect unison.

"Which?" he gasped.

Sheila frankly enjoyed the effect of her bombshell.

"It couldn't very well be the head of the firm," she smiled. "He's married already to Tom's mother."

"Quit joshing," he charged. "Is it *your* firm you're talking about?"

"Yes."

"And it's Roger Ballantine's son you've married?"
His tone was awestruck.

"Yes."

He jumped to his feet, swept off his hat, stared giddily into it, clapped it on his head again and, sinking back on the sand, bent a look of respectful wonder on his child.

"I'll bet that old codger is worth ten millions if he's worth a cent!" he exclaimed.

"That hadn't anything to do with my loving Tom," said Sheila. "It was something I couldn't help. If he'd been one of the boys at the soda fountain, I'd have felt the same. We were meant for each other. Tom says we must have loved each other in a previous incarnation."

Joe Moore betrayed mental distress.

"That dope is new to me," he confessed. "What's incarnation?"

"Another life — perhaps in Rome, Tom thinks. He knows a lot about such things."

"Let's get back to cases," said her father hastily. "When did you two meet up on your present trip to earth?"

"Almost two weeks ago."

"And you're married! I guess after all there must be something in that loved-before pipe dream."

"Don't," begged Sheila. "I hoped you'd understand."

"I'm doing my best," he said, "but I'm still shy on facts. Give me the whole story."

It was not a long story. Nor was it startlingly original. They had only to exchange a look, it appeared, to realize that they were in the hands of

Fate. But Tom had held himself marvelously in check. He did not speak a dozen words to her that first day. His manner was almost cold. The next, which was Sunday, they met in the surf, and he had pretended that she was a mermaid. Thenceforward the chronicle swam in a rosy mist. Tom was still all discretion during business hours and no one in the store dreamed that they cared. But evenings! Cupid's chariot was a rented motor car. That was how they had managed things so cleverly that even now not a soul here save Daddy Joe was one whit the wiser. The silly business of the license, the ceremony in another town — everything had gone swimmingly.

"I was back by eleven o'clock," she ended on a vibrant note of triumph.

"That was over three hours ago. Go ahead."

"But there's nothing else to tell. I've just been packing — and waiting for you."

The man drew a long breath.

"Ten — million — dollars!" he said. "What's he going to think of Lew Pam?"

"I wanted to speak to you about that. You've always been close-mouthed about your work — I thought perhaps you wouldn't want Tom to know."

Her father's eyes flickered.

"What have you told him so far?"

"Not a word."

"Hasn't he asked questions?"

"He asked how I came to be living in a boarding house, and I said my mother was dead and that I hadn't any real home. He didn't mention you."

"And you followed suit, eh?"

The girl's soft skin flamed.

"That's not fair," she protested. "What could I say till I'd seen you? Besides, we talked mainly about ourselves, how we cared and — and — oh, you know."

"Maybe he thinks I'm dead too," said Moore slowly. "Maybe he'd prefer to have you an orphan."

"Daddy Joe!" Her eyes filled. "Tom will love you as much as I do. I want you to meet him before we go away this afternoon. It's what I've planned all along. Of course I'll tell him anything you say, but why shouldn't he know the truth? Why shouldn't everybody know that you're Lew Pam? I never could make out your reason for keeping it such a secret."

"You're the reason."

"But I don't mind who knows."

"Your mother did. She hated the way I earned a living. It was born in her to hate it, I guess. Her folks had about as much use for a gin-mill as they had for a theater. I quit the stage once to please her and went back to my old line, but it was no go. I'd lost the knack of selling stoves."

"Was it always stoves you sold?" asked Sheila.

"Yes. I went on the road first for an old Pennsylvania German named Burkhardt. He was a scream to listen to — better than Weber and Fields — and I got so I could take him off to the life. I could always imitate people or pick up a new dance — same as you — and when hard times hit the stove trade I just naturally drifted into the show business. It was easy money then, and I was toting a fat roll the summer I met your mother. I ran across her

on Peaks Island in Portland Harbor. She was resting up from teaching school for nothing a year in a backwoods town in Maine. Pretty — she had every girl I'd ever seen simply backed off the map! God only knows what she saw in me." He stared absently at the bathers a moment. "Well, anyway, it was a change from codfish balls and school teaching. And, by and by, she had you for company, and that helped a lot in the long stretches when I couldn't be with her. She always sidestepped the actor bunch and, wherever she lived, gave out that her husband was a traveling man. It was Joe Moore, not Lew Pam, who carried the latchkey. She didn't want my stage name mentioned at home. She kept it from you as long as she could. She was afraid it'd queer your chances."

"But why?"

"Because she couldn't get over the feeling that the vaudeville game wasn't quite respectable. Of course it did have a black eye in the days before Keith took hold of it. That's what they remembered in her part of New England. It cut no ice with her that the big stars of the legitimate fell over one another to get into it. Don't think I'm blaming her. As far as you were concerned, I guess it was a mighty good thing. It made her all the more particular about the way she brought you up. She'd never had much money, but she was dainty as they make 'em and knew nice things as well as the next. That old chest you've got at your boarding house shows the kind of stock she came from. There's needlework in it that goes back four or five generations. And she herself was always adding to the pile against

the day —” he stopped as if racked by sudden pain — “against this very day we’re blundering through. I can’t make it seem real that you are married, Sheila. You ought to be in school. You would be this minute if the movies hadn’t put vaudeville on the blink. I sure did hate to let you go to work for Ballantine and Hoyt.”

Her face cleared.

“But if I hadn’t, I wouldn’t have met Tom,” she pointed out. “And now I want you to meet him. And I want him to hear all that you’ve told me.”

“No,” said Moore quietly. “I’m going to stay dead.”

She could not believe him in earnest.

“Why do you talk like that?” she asked. “You’ll spoil my happiness.”

“No, I won’t,” he answered, firing with his quixotic resolve. “I’ll cinch it so it can’t get away from you. I’m bound that you’ll have your chance, the kind of chance your mother dreamed of, maybe, as she stitched away on the things that went into your old chest. It’s a thundering big stroke of luck that’s happened to you. We mustn’t bungle it. So Joe Moore is dead. Remember that when your Tom begins to ask questions.”

The idea frightened her.

“Oh, you mustn’t, you mustn’t,” she faltered. “Please let me tell him. You can trust him. I know you can.”

“Maybe. He’s in love with you. But old Ten Millions is another proposition. He’s the one you’ve got to win. And you can’t win with a handicap. Lew Pam’s daughter! He’d think it was just another

chorus girl match — a hold-up — and do his damndest to break up the marriage. Another point: you're going straight to him to-night."

"To-night!"

"Yes. Where is he?"

"In New York, Tom says. At their city home."

"You go there, no matter how your husband kicks. The honeymoon can wait. Promise me you'll do this."

"Yes, I promise," she agreed faintly. "But the other thing — oh, I can't, I can't!"

He persuaded her in the end, coached her in a simple story, and kissed her good-by. Then, as they came from beneath the pier, he snapped his fingers and halted.

"I'll forget my face some day," he said. "How much money have you left?"

"About ten dollars."

"A bride ought to have more than that," he asserted, diving into his pocket. "Here's another ten. I wish it was a hundred. Buy a little keepsake."

"But when can I see you again?" she half sobbed as they stood once more before the theater. "I must see you soon."

"We'll fix that up later," he said gayly. "Run along now. I've just time to get into my make-up."

"Good-by, Daddy Joe!"

"You mean Mr. Pam, don't you?" he reminded with a twisted smile. "Good-by, Mrs. Ballantine."

CHAPTER TWO

THE honeymooners had agreed to meet at the railroad station. They arrived together, she by street car, he in a taxicab, and came face to face at the door of the waiting room.

"You don't mean to say you're traveling too!" he greeted her waggishly. "I wonder if we're headed the same way?"

Sheila rewarded the jest with a faint smile.

"Have you bought the tickets?" she asked in a low voice.

"Hours ago — right through to Washington."

"I'm sorry, Tom," she said. "But I suppose you can get the money back. I've changed my mind."

"What!" he cried, dumfounded. "Aren't you going away with me, Sheila?"

"Of course I am, silly boy," she reassured. "Aren't we married? Haven't I my suitcase along? Isn't my trunk in the baggage room? And a crate I want expressed? But I don't want to go to Washington and Old Point and all the rest as we planned. At least not now. I want to go to New York."

"New York!" Dazed by this fresh example of her infinite variety, he dropped his umbrella. "Of all places!" he exclaimed, stooping for his property and rising flustered and crimson. "Why, I might as well take you home and be done with it!"

"That's it," she caught him up. "That's just what I mean, dear. Thank you for saying it first. But hurry and see about the tickets. I'll explain on the train."

The bridegroom rallied and stood his ground.

"No, you won't," he retorted with unloverlike heat. "You'll explain right here."

"In the doorway? Before the porter?"

He had forgotten the attendant black. Bidding the man watch their combined luggage, he threw an impatient look round the waiting room and, with Sheila less eager following, marched to a vacant corner bench.

"Now," he said, "trot out your reasons, and I'll show you how foolish they are."

Sheila, on her father's side only two generations removed from the isle of perpetual unrest, felt a sturdy impulse to join battle. But, with her Irish blood, she had inherited a sense of humor, and, instead of losing her temper, she puckered her forehead in a frown which burlesqued his own.

"Prisoner at the bar, are you guilty or not guilty? Anyhow, I'll see to it that you're hanged."

"Old stuff," said Tom, unbending a trifle.

"All the easier to get the point," she returned promptly.

"Oh, I'm willing to listen," he told her, "but it really is nonsense, this notion of yours. And it isn't fair to me, Sheila. I want you all to myself for a few days. Any fellow would in my place. You were keen enough for the trip this morning. What's come over you since then?"

"I've been thinking about the future."

"Instead of getting all the fun you can out of the present!"

"We won't really get fun out of anything, Tom, till your people know."

"But I'm not going to keep them in the dark. I'll write father to-day and tell him what a wonder you are. He'll be crazy to see you."

Sheila dimpled.

"Let's don't make him wait," she said.

"But he'll expect to wait."

"Then we'll surprise him. I shouldn't care to have him get the idea that I'm afraid to meet him. And he mustn't get the idea that you are afraid, either. If he's the kind of man I've heard he is, he'll be proud of you for coming straight home with me. It's the right thing to do. You know it is, Tom. And you'll be pleasing me."

"Shall I?" He gazed upon her gloomily.

"More than I can say."

"And you think I ought to please you in this?"

"Yes."

"That settles it," he declared in hollow accents. "You don't love me."

"Tom!"

"It's true. It isn't real love you feel. If it was, your first thought would be to please me. You'd do what I want and let everybody else go hang. That's real love."

She knew that there was something amiss in this reasoning, but was in too great haste to puzzle it out.

"How can you?" she reproached. "You know I love you. I wouldn't have married you if I did not love you better than all the world. Why, I'd

go with you to a desert island and live on — on clams!”

“But Washington —”

“And I simply loathe clams,” she completed.

“Do you?” he said, struck by this revelation. “I’m very fond of them. Can’t we agree in *anything*, Sheila?” And then, as he saw her smile creep out: “Oh, you’ve got me so worked up I don’t know what I’m saying! This is a nice place for a serious talk!” He glowered at their fellow passengers. “If I had you alone, I’d make you see things my way.”

She shook her head.

“Kissing wouldn’t do a bit of good,” she replied. “Please find out about the train.”

He went at last, still protesting, and more cheerfully returned to announce that the New York train had gone.

“While we sat here?”

“Yes.”

“I believe you knew it,” she said. “When will there be another?”

“Not for an hour.”

“Did you buy our tickets?”

“No,” he answered. “There’s plenty of time. Let’s talk this over sensibly, Sheila. If you look at it —”

“Please — please — don’t begin again,” she broke in with a catch in her voice. “Call it nonsense or anything you will, Tom, but don’t wrangle with me over the very first favor I’ve asked of you.”

He pivoted abruptly on his heel and went to do her bidding. The victory was hers. But she had

no relish for it. She sympathized with Tom and was not a little sorry for herself. The honeymoons of fiction never began like this, and she felt that even in real life her case must be exceptional. It was not an easy thing her father had required of her. Already it had caused heartburnings. However, all would come right in the end, and she would be very kind to Tom hereafter. She wanted to be kind at once, but, on leaving the ticket office, he had stalked in towering dignity to the baggage-room and so vanished.

Some twenty centuries, miscalled minutes, dragged by. Then, reconnoitering, she spied him on the platform in the lee of a pyramid of trunks. It was as private as any spot about a railway station could be, and her lover's wish that he might have her alone was forthwith gratified. By himself he had hatched two fresh arguments, but he forebore to mention them. Long before train time they were of a single mind. It was a mind of the feminine gender.

To be traveling together was a blissful sensation, and there were intervals during the journey when they even forgot toward what destination they sped. The traffic was light, and neither in the chair car nor in the diner were they troubled by near neighbors. Their bridal supper had the intimacy of a stolen rendezvous, and they ate with gusto they knew not what.

"Do you think the waiter suspects that we've just been married?" asked Sheila. "He's one glittering smile."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Tom. "They're experts at spotting newlyweds, those chaps. Besides I'm not good looking enough to pass for your brother."

"Fishing!" she accused. "You know you're good looking."

"Nobody ever told me so."

"Then perhaps I oughtn't. But I will. I'd call you very good looking. You make me think of some of the men in the magazine illustrations."

"Not the collar-ad. Johnnies!"

"Don't," she pouted. "I'm serious. I mean the ones in the stories, of course — the kind who win football games and boat races, and are clear-cut and clean-limbed and all that."

"They wear immaculate evening clothes, too," he added, grinning. "And they have red blood in their veins."

"You're poking fun at me. But you are like some of the pictures, all the same. It was the first thing I noticed about you."

"Was it?" he exclaimed. "Why, I had almost that thought about you, Sheila. I told myself that you might have stepped out of a ripping cover design. I didn't believe there were any such girls till I met you. And then I realized that you could give the whole outfit cards and spades."

"Tom!"

"Yes, you could. You've the peachiest skin, the evenest, whitest teeth —"

"No better than yours — teeth, I mean."

"Features that are regular without being insipid —"

"So are yours."

"Hair of just the right shade of brown —"

"Which shade is that?"

"Yours. I can't describe it. And eyes — why,

I've lain awake nights thinking about your eyes. They're like stars and sapphires and wood violets all at once. Nobody ever had such eyes."

Sheila sighed her ineffable content.

"I do love you, Tom," she said.

"I worship you," he vowed.

They attacked the salad.

"Your voice," he went on presently. "I liked that too from the start. It's different. Most girls screech — especially girls who work for a living."

"So I've noticed," said Sheila.

"Is that why you keep your voice low?"

"Yes," she admitted. "Besides, it helped sell goods."

"And you dress quietly," he observed.

"We had to in the B & H shop, you know."

"But not out of it. Some of our employees looked like parrots when I met them outside."

"That's because they didn't keep their eyes open."

"They'd never look at things from your point of view, Sheila. You're a thoroughbred. I wish I'd known your people."

She was silent and he, mistaking the cause of her reticence, respected it. As her father had surmised, he believed her alone in the world and was at heart relieved that he was to be all in all to her. Some day, he supposed, she would speak of her bereavement, but his curiosity as to her parentage was slight. Indeed he found it hard to associate her with such unromantic facts as parents. Nothing short of an act of special creation could satisfactorily account for such a glorious being. He beheld her unique and perfect of her kind.

But Sheila, pledged to secrecy and conscious of her burden, gave him credit for deep concern and was cast into a panic by his next words.

"By the way," he said. "I saw you on the Board Walk this afternoon."

She felt her cheeks blaze.

"Where were you?"

"Coming from luncheon with the manager. I'm sure he didn't see you — we were too far away — but of course I couldn't be fooled at any distance."

"You weren't," she said. "I had an errand to do."

"When I saw you, you were talking to a smooth-faced man in a gray suit."

"Yes," she assented as casually as she could.

"I met some one I knew."

"Shall I lower the window shade?" he offered.

"Your face looks hot."

"Please," she said. "It's like August to-day."

"You haven't a headache?" he questioned, settling back in his seat.

She thought the ordeal past and sparkled into her usual vivacity.

"To-day? What an idea!"

Tom addressed himself again to his thumbscrews.

"Who was that man, Sheila?"

She held to her smile, but it felt like a grimace of pain as she plunged down the path marked out for her.

"He once boarded in the same house with me," she explained.

"He had a nerve to hold you up! He looked old enough to be your father."

Sheila lifted her head.

"He's a gentleman," she said. "And I was glad to see him. I shall always be glad to see him. He — he knew my father."

"Oh!" said Tom. "What is his name?"

"Lew Pam."

"A queer name," he commented, his curiosity spent at last. "Try these grapes, dearest."

They lingered at table till the outflung suburbs, dotted with lights, began wheeling by, and then, swaying and laughing, started back to their chair car. By the doorway of a smoking compartment a lurch of the train threw her into his arms. The place was deserted, and the resourceful Tom whisked her inside and kissed her.

"Some one will come," she panted, regaining her freedom of speech. "Let me go now."

"Not till you've returned it."

She paid the debt with usury.

"You do care, don't you?" he whispered unsteadily.

"You know, Tom!"

"And you always will?"

"Forever and ever."

"And you'd rather have gone the other way tonight if things had been different?"

"Much rather."

They embraced again and with high color, loosened hairpins, a rumpled cravat and perfect decorum re-entered their own car and the world of things as they are.

New York cast its shadow before, and they found less and less to say to each other as the train fled across the salt marshes and roared under the Hudson.

Then the vast structure which, were it not a railway station, might well be a Roman bath, dwarfed them to further insignificance and, streaming out with their fellow pigmies, they climbed into a cab and like two meek children groped for each other's hand.

"It's a short ride," said Tom, rescuing his voice.

"Is it?" said Sheila, feeling that she must speak now or go dumb ever after. "Where do you live?"

"In Sixty-fourth Street just off the Avenue," he answered in firmer tones. "Didn't I ever tell you? I hope you'll like the house."

She hoped so too — fervently — and the conversation again failed. They passed a bulletin board beset by a crowd. History was in the making. But to Sheila the Battle of the Marne seemed a Lilliputian affair beside the adventure on which she was embarked. Then, all too soon, the ride was over, and she was on the pavement staring up at a portly stone dwelling while Tom paid the fare. The site alone must have cost innumerable cakes of chocolate, she thought, for, unlike its neighbors, the deep arch of its doorway pierced its middle and not its flank. In a word, it was a whole house instead of a half portion, and Sheila, not a total stranger to New York, was duly impressed.

"It's a palace, Tom," she exclaimed.

He gave a hollow laugh and squeezed her arm as they mounted the steps.

"Buck up!" he charged. "They won't eat you."

"I'm not afraid," she declared, but her heart pounded.

The iron grill of the double doors struck her as very like a cage, but her woman's eye also noted the

intricate pattern of the lace behind the glass. Tom rang, and a butler in silhouette became a butler in the flesh with a human smile for the son of the house who greeted him with an offhand "Hello, Ben!" At sight of Sheila this smile took on more formality, but she was unaware of it. For the instant her vision was overborne by gray stone walls, hung with tapestries, and a gray stone staircase which rose in proud magnificence to a balcony. It seemed to symbolize and flaunt all the family millions, that overpowering staircase. She would not have marveled to behold Roger Ballantine descending it clad in cloth of gold.

Tom's voice, keyed to a nervous pitch, brought her back.

"Out!" he was saying.

"Yes, sir."

"All of them?"

"Yes, Mr. Tom. It was a dinner engagement."

"Theater too?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Do you hear that, Sheila? They mayn't be back till all hours."

Her heart sank as she faced him. Would he, who had been so loath to come, consent to wait? Had she still the courage and the will for two? Then the butler saved the day. Gathering up their hand luggage, he swung Sheila's modest suitcase gently to the fore.

"Does this go in one of the guest chambers, sir?" he asked.

Tom started from his trance of indecision.

"Of course," he said. "Take it to the Rose Room."

And then, to Sheila: "That's your favorite color, I believe. Would you like to go up for a while?"

She declined and bestowed a half smile on the servant for his unwitting aid. She thought it would be gracious in Tom to present "Ben" who seemed to have none of the repellent traits of the legendary butler, but Tom dismissed him with a careless "That's all", and led her into a small oak-paneled reception room which connected only with the hall.

"Now that Bug Eyes is out of the way," he said, "I'll show you the shack."

"I'd rather you wouldn't," she replied, choosing a singularly uncomfortable chair.

"But it's your home, Sheila."

"Not yet."

"Then let me show you *my* home," he urged restlessly.

"No," she said. "Even with you I'd feel like a burglar. I'll wait for your mother."

"But this is no place to do your waiting. It's just a cold storage box for callers we're not keen about."

Sheila found her smile again.

"I'm where I belong then," she said. "But don't let me keep you in cold storage, Tom."

"Perhaps you think I'd rather play billiards with myself or take a nap," he suggested with a wan gayety which went out before it was fairly alight. "Come over to this fool bench. At any rate it's built for two. This junk is all fifteenth century. I guess nobody sat down in those days."

She went to him, and he began an ardent tour of her features. He kissed her eyes, her mouth, the dimples on either side of her mouth, her throat, her

hands. Sheila could not abandon her whole mind to these endearments, but she assisted gladly. They gave Tom something to do. But unluckily his excursion brought him to the new circlet of gold on her left hand, and at the touch of the metal his brain resumed its function.

"This is all wrong," he groaned. "We're fools to be here. Let's go while the going's good."

"Tom!" she reproached. "You promised to do this for me."

"I've kept my word. We've come, haven't we? That's the main point. It's no fault of ours that the family are out. Why should we hang around for them? I'll leave a note, tell them that we called —"

"You can't do that. It would be worse than staying away altogether."

"We should have stayed away. I was an ass to give in to you. I don't see how you could ask it of me. Don't persist in this nonsense, my darling. I want you all to myself now. We'll come back to-morrow if you like. Morning's the time to face things."

"To-night is the time to face this thing," she said. "We mustn't run away from it."

He drew off coldly.

"How can you be so stubborn — so hard?"

"Hard!" The tears came. "Oh, Tom!"

"You don't look it, but you are. It only shows that you can't tell anything from a woman's face."

She did not try to refute this cynicism and, after a moment of aloofness, he rejected it himself and took her in his arms. But his caresses were now

sketchy in character and faulty in technique. At every sound from the street he would start and listen.

"This is getting on my nerves," he owned finally. "I'll smoke if you don't mind."

"Do," she said.

He took a cigarette from his case, searched his pockets for matches, turned to a button in the paneling, and then let his hand fall.

"No," he decided. "Ben has had excitement enough for one evening. I'll get a light in the smoking room."

She listened to his step recede and die away in the unknown spaces beyond the hall. As the silence of the house settled round her, she felt suddenly forlorn. And apprehensive. What if Tom's people returned before he did! What would she say to them? What could she say? She strained her ear for his footfall and presently relaxed with a sigh of relief. But the next instant she was rigid. It was the butler who crossed her line of vision, and his goal was the outer door. There was a murmur of explanation in the hall. She caught the words "Mr. Tom" and "a guest." Then the Ballantines were upon her.

CHAPTER THREE

THEY seemed an army as they advanced. But the actual count was three: a ruddy man with iron-gray hair; a middle-aged woman, handsome, but too plump for her height; and a pale girl of Tom's age, perhaps, whose shoulders were too thin for her gown. Their ranks broke in some disorder at sight of Sheila.

"Why, where is the lad?" demanded Roger Ballantine of no one in particular.

Sheila rose and moved forward like a sleepwalker. Mrs. Ballantine, smiling vaguely, met her halfway across the room.

"I don't think I've had the pleasure," she said. "Are you — er — a friend of my son?"

Sheila cast a dismayed glance toward the door, but encountered only the intent gaze of the thin girl whose dark eyebrows had now met.

"We're more than friends," she replied in a low voice. "But it's really Tom's place to explain."

"More than friends!" Mrs. Ballantine caught at her breast and laid waste a cluster of orchids. "What has happened? What has become of Tom?" And, in the same tone: "Where are my smelling salts?"

Her husband put her aside.

"Let me handle this," he said crisply. "Now,

young woman, be good enough to state your business."

Her eyes flashed.

"This isn't a business call," she said.

"Your name?" he snapped.

"Sheila Ballantine. I'm your son's wife."

His gaze bored her through, but she endured it without flinching. Whereupon Tom, blushing bridegroom, reentered the bosom of his family.

"My poor boy!" cried his mother, pressing him to the ruined orchids. "You poor, foolish, headstrong boy!"

Her array of adjectives struck him as highly inept and, releasing himself, he went to Sheila's side.

"Forgive me, dear," he entreated. "I didn't mean to let you in for this alone."

"There's plenty left for you," assured his father grimly. "When and where were you married?"

Tom reduced the prismatic adventure to bald statistics.

"And then we came straight here," he added.

"Because you were short of money?"

"No, sir. It seemed the square thing to do."

"Whose idea was it?"

"Tom mentioned it first," said Sheila.

"Sheila put it in my head," said Tom.

Roger Ballantine's trying gaze riveted once more on his daughter-in-law.

"Yet you look like a schoolgirl," he commented dryly. "How old are you?"

"Eighteen," interposed Tom chivalrously. "It's a year since she left school. She's been earning her living —"

"That'll do," his father cut him off. "Let her speak for herself."

"Yes, Tom," she agreed.

"And now what's this about earning your own living? What was your work?"

"Selling candy."

"Eh!" Her inquisitor's florid skin went a deeper red. "So *that* is how it happened?"

"Yes," she replied. "That is how it happened. I clerked in your Atlantic City branch."

Mrs. Ballantine uttered a sharp moan.

"This is the last straw," she cried. "But you brought it on yourself, Roger. You would have them pretty. I never approved of it. I told you so again and again. Where did I put my smelling salts? I feel positively ill. I think I'm going to faint."

"No, you're not." He swung round to meet this disconcerting rear attack. "You're going to help me decide what's best. Tom, take your mother upstairs to the library."

He herded them toward the door with sweeping gestures, and Sheila noticed that the pale girl was no longer of their company. Then, just short of the hall, she felt a not unkindly hand grasp her arm and draw her back.

"I'd like to believe in you, my girl," said Roger Ballantine. "It may help if you'll answer a few questions while we're here by ourselves."

Sheila searched his face.

"Will it be fair to Tom?"

A ghost of a smile twitched at the corners of his stern mouth.

"If I'm not fair to Tom," he retorted, "nobody on God's footstool ever will be. No boy ever had a father who tried harder to do the right thing by him."

"No father ever had a better son," she said with conviction.

"Maybe so. But he hasn't quite cornered the wisdom market yet, Harvard notwithstanding. There are several things he doesn't know much about. One of them is how to make a living. Another is women. You have the advantage of him on both counts."

"He knows me," said Sheila.

"You met first in Atlantic City?"

"Yes."

"Then he's mastered the subject in less than a fortnight!"

She made a little defensive gesture as if warding off his sarcasm.

"We love each other," she said. "And if you love, you trust. I didn't care who Tom was. It was *what* he was that mattered. And he felt exactly the same way about me. We didn't stop to think what anybody else would say or do. We were — oh it was like the undertow that sweeps the bathers out. Of course he ought to have written you or his mother. He would have done it if we hadn't decided all at once to get married. It was over in no time."

"The binding part of the transaction usually is. But what about your own relations? Had you no parents to consult or ignore?"

"My mother has been dead two years."

"And your father?"

Sheila opened her lips, but the words she had got by rote would not come. Two very genuine tears,

however, started at the same instant from either eye and raced each other to her cheeks. Her questioner noted this simple phenomenon. Somewhat to his astonishment, he also thought of violets and dew.

"You lost him more recently?" he suggested.

She drooped her head in assent.

"What was his name?"

"Joseph Moore."

"And his business?"

"Commercial traveler," she answered in better voice, feeling herself on firmer ground. "He sold stoves."

"Who was his last employer?"

"A firm in Philadelphia — the R. G. Drew Company."

"Was that where you lived?"

"One of the places. We moved several times."

"To other cities?"

"Yes."

"That must have cut into your schooling."

"Not a great deal. Mother was particular about keeping me in school. She used to teach when she was a girl in Maine."

"And you went to work for Ballantine and Hoyt a year ago?"

"Yes."

"I have been in Atlantic City within that time."

"I know," she said. "It was toward the end of February that you came."

"How did it happen that I didn't see you?"

"I had taken cold, and the manager sent me home. It was the only day all year I missed work."

"Was it?" His eyes gleamed appreciatively. "I

wish more of the girls could say as much." He reflected briefly, still holding her with his gaze. "We'll go upstairs now."

They mounted, not by the path of glory, but by an intimate and efficient toy of an elevator which captivated Sheila's fancy. She felt that if she were its owner she would push its surprising buttons by the hour. But Roger Ballantine operated it as coldly as if it were a cash register and turned her out in a sumptuous central chamber with rooms opening all round and the balcony, where the staircase rose, showing in haughty majesty at its far end.

Abruptly she found herself in a place of many books, subdued lights, and heavy mental gloom. Tom was pacing before the hearth like a sentry who had no stomach for soldiering. His mother, seated at a little distance, was clinging to the hand of the girl of mystery who started up at their coming and, gliding round them, slipped noiselessly out of the door. Sheila gave her but a glance. Her heart had choked with pity for the older woman. She was weeping with the still grief which is hardest of all to look upon. Her boy might have been dead.

Sheila walked swiftly across to her.

"Have I hurt you so much?" she asked. "I'm sorry for that — truly I am. But you want Tom to be happy, don't you?"

"He *was* happy." Mrs. Ballantine dabbed at her eyes with a handkerchief never meant for practical use. "We were all happy. And now you've upset everything — spoiled all our plans. I didn't know what to say to Ethel, poor girl. I could hardly look her in the face."

"It's none of Ethel's business," broke in Tom, warm in color and speech. "She isn't even a relation."

Sheila turned to him.

"Who is Ethel?"

"Miss Hoyt. You just saw her here. She's father's ward, the daughter of his former partner. There's nothing between us. It's all rot — sheer imagination."

"Tom!" wailed his mother.

The head of the family interfered.

"This is no post mortem," he said. "Sit down, Sheila. You too, Tom." He himself remained standing with his arms loosely crossed. "Now that we've weathered the first shock," he went on, "I'd like to hear more of the details. So it was a country justice of the peace who married you?"

The bridegroom squirmed in his chair.

"Yes, sir."

"No trouble to find witnesses, I daresay?"

"No, sir. We had two."

"Who were they?"

"One was a law clerk."

"And the other?"

"The janitor of the building," answered Tom with less relish. "Both names are signed to the certificate."

"I'll take a look at the document."

Sheila drew the paper from her blouse, and he read and returned it without comment.

"Is it legal?" quavered Mrs. Ballantine. "Is Tom really married?"

Her husband shrugged.

"Haven't you the boy's word for it? If he says he's married, he is, certificate or no certificate. It's not the legality, but the publicity of this affair I'm trying to sift. I want to find out exactly how many people know."

"Why shouldn't everybody in the world know?" demanded Tom.

"You'll hear in a minute. What did you do after you got back to Atlantic City?"

"I dropped Sheila near her boarding house and went directly to the store. I had a luncheon engagement with the manager. Naturally I wouldn't tell him or any one else before you and mother."

"And you?" He faced Sheila. "How did you put in your time?"

"I telephoned the manager that I was leaving town and went home and finished packing."

"You didn't confide in your landlady?"

"No, sir."

"Or in any fellow boarder or chance acquaintance?"

"No, Mr. Ballantine."

It was a narrow loophole, but it served. Tom again bore the brunt of the cross-examination.

"I judge that you kept well out of the limelight while you were at the shore," said his father. "Did your name get into the local papers at all?"

"Only once. It was printed among the hotel arrivals — misprinted rather. It was given as Valentine."

"Valentine! Almost prophetic, wasn't it?" He walked the length of the hearth rug, halted a moment with his back turned, and then swung round in quick decision. "We'll risk it," he said. "Tom, you'll leave to-morrow for college."

"For college!"

"As soon as you can get your things together."

The bridegroom's face mirrored the whirling chaos of his mind.

"Oh, look here!" he exploded. "I'm not a kid any longer. My place is with Sheila. I'll go to work, take any position in the business you say; but this talk of going back to college is foolish. I can't go back now. They wouldn't let me."

"They'll let you if the news of your marriage doesn't leak out. You've had the gumption to keep it quiet so far, and I propose that it shall be kept quiet till you finish your course and get your sheepskin. God Almighty only knows whether it'll be worth bringing home, but bring it you shall. Until June, then, you two will see each other at such times and under such conditions as I shall dictate. By the end of the week I'll have this girl entered as my ward in a first-class school."

Tom bounced wrathfully to his feet.

"Send me — a married man — back to college!" he exclaimed. "Pack my wife off to school! What do you take us for?"

"I know what I take *you* for. But this girl shows signs of intelligence."

"Don't listen to him, Sheila," ordered Tom. "This is just a scheme to separate us and break up our marriage."

"Do you believe that?" asked Roger, turning to her.

"No," she said.

"Sheila!" cried her husband in passionate reproach. "You surely don't think this outrageous proposal is right?"

"Right?" she repeated slowly. "How can I tell, Tom? Even your father isn't sure that it's worth your while to graduate."

Ballantine brought his fist crashing down on the reading table.

"Right or wrong," he shouted, "it's the dose you'll swallow, young man! I won't have the plans of years knocked in the head. Before you were knee high I made up my mind that you'd have what I couldn't have — a college training. I didn't know then how I'd raise the money to see it through. Sometimes I almost gave up hope, things looked so black. But it all came straight. And, by heaven, it's going to stay straight! You'll do your part. You'll stick to your job till it's done. You'll nail down that degree."

Tom blinked as the sturdy fist dramatized the nailing process within a scant yard of his nose, and his years and pride fell from him.

"Mother!" he appealed, reverting to the tactics of boyhood. "Can't you do something? Can't you make him see how stubborn and unreasonable he is?"

Mrs. Ballantine not only declined the heroic task, but supplied tyranny with a fresh argument.

"You ought to go back for your social future if nothing more," she declared. "You haven't made the most of your opportunities at Harvard. Your clubs aren't *the* clubs, Ethel says, and as for your friends —"

"We'll pass that," interrupted her husband. "He has kept off the dean's black list, at any rate. He hasn't been a rowdy or a loafer."

Coming from him, this was extravagant praise, but Tom built no false hopes on it. He turned in pale determination to Sheila.

"It rests with you," he told her. "If you say the word, we'll go away together. I can take care of you somehow."

Sheila became radiant. Her lover stood once more upon his pinnacle.

"Of course you can," she replied. "And don't I know how to make a living? But, Tom, it isn't such a long time to June."

His face was an enigma. No one but himself knew what he felt.

"You've decided," he said tersely.

"That's the talk!" The paternal hand clapped him vigorously on the shoulder. "Now we'll adjourn."

"I shan't sleep a wink," complained Mrs. Ballantine, rising. "My nerves are wrecked."

Tom ceased to be inscrutable.

"I'll show you to your room, Sheila," he said.

"Oh, your mother will do the honors," assured his father blandly. "You will bunk with me, son. I've several things to say to you."

CHAPTER FOUR

MRS. BALLANTINE led Sheila to her room like a jailor rather than a hostess.

"If you need anything," she said with icy civility, "my own maid is still up."

"Thank you," said Sheila. "I won't trouble her. I haven't a hook or button that I can't reach myself."

They eyed each other an instant at the threshold, and the girl thought the older woman about to take pity on her youth. But the impulse, if it existed, came to nothing. Without another syllable Tom's mother turned her back and went in bitter martyrdom away.

Sheila stared through scalding tears at the panels of the closed door and began with trembling fingers to unpin the little hat of the jaunty quill. Then, groping blindly, she dragged herself across a giant's room and flung herself face downward on a giant's bed. The day of days was over. From the happiest she had become the most unhappy of mortals.

And all because she had followed the advice of Daddy Joe. But for that rash promise of hers everything would have turned out differently. She and Tom would have gone honeymooning like other lovers. His people would have had to accept the situation. There would have been no thought of banishing him to college and her to school. She

would not have been put to the cruel necessity of taking sides against her husband. Tom's last look had cut her to the heart. He was wretched, too, and through no fault of his own. It was her doing — and Daddy Joe's.

Yet she could not blame her father. Her tears started afresh as she thought of his unselfishness. Even now he would be wondering about her, pacing the shore, unable to sleep. He would have no peace till he heard from her. And not even then. She could tell him only that she was miserable; that she detested the elder Ballantines; that the one was a tyrant and the other a snob; that this huge house was but a showy prison in which she could never, never, never feel at home.

Whereupon her cheek brushed something less soft than linen and, moving her head, her still swimming eyes took curious note of a letter embroidered in a corner of the down-turned sheet. It was Old English, portly and impressive, and with a thrill quite at odds with her late musings, it came to her that this initial was now her own. It was a trifle to change her viewpoint, but such was its effect, and with a stouter courage she sat up and looked round. It was the room of Tom's choice, and the color which gave it its name glowed delicately in the silken canopy above her head, in the window hangings, the shaded lights and the upholstery, and even lent a ribbon of warmth to the white tiling of a luxurious bath beyond. A Blue Room would have plunged her in still lower spirits. The Rose Room restored her optimism. After a minute survey of its glories, she became distinctly less miserable; she suspended

judgment on the elder Ballantines; she found features to admire in their house. By the time her eyes grew heavy, the walls had shrunk to fair proportions and the bed of the silken canopy seemed none too large.

It was six-thirty by the French clock on the French mantelpiece when she woke, and the force of habit tumbled her, flushed and drowsy, out of bed before she recalled that she was no longer an employée of the mighty Ballantines, but a Ballantine herself. After that she could no more have nodded off than Cinderella in her golden coach. She dressed with the leisureliness of holidays, but at that it was only a quarter past seven when a mirror, in which she could actually see her shoes, assured her that she had done her best. It was now her regular breakfast hour, and her appetite was punctual.

What breakfast meant in the Ballantine household became a theme for poignant conjecture. Would she be summoned to a stately ceremony which would chill the food in her very mouth? But, as the minutes lapsed, this phase of the question lost significance. How they ate ceased to matter. The vital point was when? At half after eight, grown reckless, she pushed an electric button, and with startling promptness a maid, who fell far below the B & H standard of beauty, stood faintly smiling at the door. Any smile was a comfort, and Sheila beamed her brightest in return.

"Am I up frightfully early?" she asked.

"Ah, no." The servant's smile gained in warmth. "Will mademoiselle have her coffee here or downstairs in the breakfast room?"

Sheila was at once harrowed by the fear that coffee meant literally coffee and stirred by the fact that she had been addressed as "mademoiselle" by a bona fide French maid.

"In the breakfast room," she said, hoping to find Tom there alone.

Shy of exposing her ignorance of the house, she put no further queries. Giving the toy elevator and its complicated buttons a wide berth, she rather gingerly descended the grand staircase and, encountering the human butler at the foot, went the rest of the way in his convoy.

"Are any of the family down?" she inquired.

"Yes, miss," he said. "Mr. Ballantine, as usual."

Unlucky choice! Clearly it was not Tom she would have to herself. But there was no turning back now. She was in the very door of the breakfast room. Her father-in-law's glance vaulted the rims of his eye-glasses and the top of his newspaper and fastened on her own.

"Morning," he shot at her. "Unexpected pleasure." And to the servant: "Give Miss Moore a seat by me."

She sank meekly into a chair at his elbow and drew a plebeian banana from a silver basket of otherwise patrician fruit which the man offered.

"Used to a real breakfast, aren't you?" asked her host.

"Whatever there is," she said.

"There's anything you want."

Sheila looked at his plate for guidance and was astounded to recognize a familiar friend.

"Some of that, please," she requested.

"Good judgment," said Roger Ballantine. "They fix up this corned beef hash specially for me, and it's prime."

The servant went deftly to and fro for an interval and finally, at a sign from the head of the table, left them alone. Mr. Ballantine expelled a deep breath of relief and tossed his newspaper to the floor.

"So far so good," he said. "I've been through them all — New York and Philadelphia both — and there isn't a line about it. Now, if the Jersey journalists don't get the scent, everything will be as right as rain."

"I hope so," said Sheila.

"Don't hope — *believe*," he charged sharply. "That's the only way to get anywhere. But you know that. You couldn't have worked a year in a B & H shop without learning it. You found that the goods you had the strongest belief in were the goods you sold easiest. Well, it's the same with this proposition. You've got to believe in it. You've got to make Tom believe in it."

"Haven't you done that?" she asked.

"No," he admitted frankly. "Last night I didn't quite practice what I preach. That's why I'm asking your help to-day. I count on you to send Tom away in the right frame of mind — ready to eat work, keen to show the stuff that's in him, bound to succeed."

"I must see him alone," she stipulated.

"Of course."

"Shall I wait here?"

"No; he breakfasted long ago. I'll send him to the library in about half an hour. You won't be

disturbed there. Nobody reads in this family. I can't take the time, and the others won't."

After this confidence he lapsed into silence till she had finished, when he lit an unmistakably bad cigar and, as if taking it for granted that she was now at home, abruptly quitted her society. Braced by the superlative hash, Sheila mounted the grand staircase without a tremor.

By daylight the library was less forbidding. The sun warmed its somewhat somber beams and shelving and cheerily picked out the gold of the bindings. Sheila skimmed a few of the trim ranks in red morocco, but "Works of" seemed the prevailing title, and she decided that the indifferent family knew very well what they were about. A terrestrial globe of heroic dimensions struck her fancy, however, and she turned it with genuine interest till Tom slammed a solid door behind him and put an end to her travels.

"What are you doing?" he demanded.

"Improving my mind," she said. "Good morning, dear."

He stood by the door, regarding her sternly.

"I believe you were just spinning it to see it go," he averred.

"Well, what of it?" She went smiling to meet him. "It's better than moping over what can't be helped. Aren't you going to kiss me?"

His look implied that his mood was too austere for kisses, but Sheila put her lips within an inch of his, and he fell to her plane without tedious delay.

"I've had a horrible night," he said presently.

"Poor Tom!" she sighed. "Couldn't you sleep?"

"With father talking his head off!"

"Was he?"

"Till all hours. And even then I couldn't get a wink. I just thought and thought. But you slept. I can tell it by your eyes."

"Not till very late."

"I don't see how you could sleep at all. But you don't take this as seriously as I do. You don't appreciate what it means. Why, Sheila, I can only see you once in a while — like this — just as if we were merely engaged."

Sheila brushed back his indignant forelock.

"Oh, well," she returned, "we haven't had a real engagement yet, you know."

Her husband's expression grew tense.

"But it's infamous," he exclaimed. "We might as well not be married."

She let her hand fall and drew back a trifle.

"We know we are, Tom. That makes all the difference in the world."

"Does it?"

"Of course. Don't we belong to each other?"

"Legally." His gaze hardened.

"And we can write," she added. "Your father won't object to that. You must send me real love letters, Tom. I'll look for one every day. And I'll answer every day. You'll find out how much I care for you."

"I'm finding out now," he burst forth bitterly. "This cold-blooded plan of father's suits you exactly. It will be all the same to you if we never see each other between now and June. You're going to have a lot of swagger clothes and attend a fashionable school, and it has turned your head. You

switched over to father's side the minute he mentioned it."

"How can you be so unjust?" she cried. "I hate the thought of going to school again — at least to that kind of a school. I'd a thousand times rather earn my own living till you're through college. But I'm not a fool. I know that I need a better education, and I'm going to get it for your sake. I don't want you ever to feel ashamed of me, Tom. And I haven't taken sides against you. Your father's side is your side if you could only see it."

He stared as if he had discovered strange new subtleties in the feminine mind and then, like the downright male he was, came charging back to the primal issue.

"You couldn't split hairs that way if you were truly in love," he declared. "You wouldn't hunt for reasons and excuses. You'd simply want to come to me as I want you to come — not next June, but now."

Her mouth trembled piteously and with a child-like gesture she put out her hands to him.

"Can't you — oh, can't you see, Tom, that I adore you, that it breaks my heart to say good-by even for a little while? Don't make it harder for me than it is already. I don't know how I'm going to live without you. I shan't have a happy moment after you go. I — I shall count the days till we can be together for always."

He swooped upon her, fiercely possessive.

"There won't be any days to count," he asserted. "I won't give you up."

"You're hurting me," she gasped, when she could.

"I don't care. You've hurt me."

She struggled against him, half afraid, and then ceased to struggle. He had become an embodied whirlwind, she a leaf in the gale.

"There!" he ejaculated, releasing her. "We'll have no more nonsense."

Sheila rubbed her bruised lips.

"You've acted like a bully," she said angrily. "I won't let you maul me like — like that."

"Don't tantalize me then," he warned. "And get your bag ready. We'll dig out of here at once."

"No, we won't," she replied. "We've agreed to do as your father wishes."

"You did the agreeing. But the real say-so is mine. So pack your things."

"No."

"But you've got to do as I tell you now. It's your duty as my wife."

"Not if you're in the wrong. And you are. You'll look at everything differently in a day or two. You'll realize that your father is right."

"Father is a damned fool."

"Tom!" she rebuked. "What if he heard you?"

"Oh, he doesn't mind," said a tolerant voice from the door. "I often felt that way about my father before I cut my eye teeth. Son, you've just time to make your train comfortably."

Tom glared from one to the other.

"I've cut my eye teeth sure enough," he said bitterly. "Between you two I haven't an illusion left. You'd be kinder to a dog."

The girl gave a little moan of pain.

"It isn't true," she protested.

"It is true." He rounded on her in cold fury. "You're as hard as he is. You're for number one every time. I'm a meal ticket, that's all. You showed your true colors as soon as you got me hooked. You wouldn't go away with me as any other wife would. You bamboozled me into coming back here so that you could fix things with him. And now you're knuckling in to everything he demands. And you have the cheek to pretend that you're doing it for my sake. But you can't pull the wool over my eyes any longer. You married me for what you could get out of me, just as you'd have married him if you'd had the chance."

His father strode across the room and clutched him by the collar.

"Eat your words, you cub!" he commanded. "Apologize to your wife!"

"Oh, no!" pleaded Sheila, horrified at the turn of affairs. "He doesn't mean it — he can't mean it."

Roger Ballantine tightened his hold.

"Apologize!" he repeated.

But Tom, chalky white, wrenched himself with a defiant oath from that shameful pillory, rushed to the door and, without a backward glance, vanished tragically from their view.

CHAPTER FIVE

WITH no clear notion of how she got there, Sheila found herself weeping on Roger Ballantine's shoulder. He seemed the one fixed point in a reeling universe.

"We've made a terrible m-mess of things," she sobbed.

"We!"

"He's gone away hating us both. You shouldn't have tried to make him apologize. And I — I ought to have been more kind."

He held her off at arm's length.

"You've shown backbone so far," he said roughly. "Don't turn jellyfish now."

His harsh injunction steadied her. She became a vertebrate once more and in token of it stood alone.

"I'm not very old," she said.

"No," he rejoined, "but you have a level head. Your coming straight here was a pretty shrewd move for a girl of eighteen."

Sheila's color quickened.

"You choked Tom for saying something like that to me, Mr. Ballantine."

"That's one on me," he owned, plainly taken aback. "But I don't mean anything uncomplimentary. I'm merely giving you credit for brains."

"I didn't show brains in getting married as I did," she said in an altered tone. "It was like a dream."

"I daresay. But you woke up quicker than most. And you've been wide awake ever since. Whatever your motives — and I think better of them than Tom does at this minute — you have done the square thing by me, and I'm going to do the square thing by you. As I told you last night, I'll put you in school — one of the best — and I'll put you there as my ward. I shan't stint you. You'll have the best that's to be had — clothes, pocket money, all the privileges of a rich girl."

"I don't want them," she said.

"Eh! What bee is in your bonnet now? You can't go back to clerking, and I won't support you in idleness."

"It isn't school I mind," she told him. "Nobody knows better than I how much I need it. But the other things — no. It's like paying me for making Tom miserable."

"So that's how you look at it?"

"Yes. Don't think me ungrateful."

"We'll leave gratitude out of this," he said dryly. "And you'll have to shift your viewpoint. This isn't a bribe I'm proposing. It's a test — the stiffest test of character I know. I want to find out whether you can stand prosperity."

She looked at him and wondered whether she could ever find the way to his heart.

"Very well," she assented. "I'll go."

"I thought you would," he said, with a lurking smile. "Mrs. Ballantine will take you shopping by and by."

He left her as unceremoniously as before, and she went forlornly to her room. Her trunk, unstrapped, now intruded a shabby note in the color scheme, and she had no sooner entered than the maid she had summoned earlier tapped at her door and asked for her keys.

"I'll unpack myself," said Sheila.

The woman spread her hands.

"It is madame's order," she explained.

There seemed nothing for it but to submit, and Sheila watched her with ruthless efficiency strew the bed and a chaise longue with the contents of her trunk and suitcase. When the exposure was complete she gave a satisfied "Voilà!" and disappeared. A moment later came another knock, and Tom's wife and Tom's mother once more stood face to face.

"I have come to go over your wardrobe and see what you need," she stated in a colorless voice.

Sheila made way for her in silence, and she passed slowly from the bed to the chaise longue with an air something between that of a tenement inspector and a royal personage. But the girl divined that she had her share of human curiosity, and she was quick to sense a growing relief in her manner.

"This is rather smart," she said, fingering a blouse. "Who made it?"

"I did," said Sheila.

Mrs. Ballantine gave the garment a closer scrutiny before she laid it down.

"You hurried over the buttonholes," she commented.

"Yes," said Sheila. "Buttonholes don't interest me."

"Nor me," added her visitor unexpectedly.

The topic was evidently exhausted, and another silence fell. But presently the exploring eyes wandered to a small collection of footgear marshaled by the trunk and fixed disapprovingly on a pair of fawn-colored boots which laced up the back.

"Those don't go with your other belongings. They're decidedly common."

"I know it," admitted the girl. "They're one of my mistakes."

"Then why have you kept them?"

"I thought they might do for rainy weather if I could get them dyed."

"Throw them away," ordered Mrs. Ballantine with a faint echo of her husband's decision. "And, by the way: I understand that there is some kind of a crated box in the basement. What is in it?"

"Mainly linen."

"Linen?"

"Things my mother inherited — others that she made for me."

"Housekeeping articles?"

"Yes."

"Then it's a marriage chest?"

"I suppose that is the right name for it."

Mrs. Ballantine's reflections were obscure. And brief.

"We'll go out now," she said abruptly. "Meet me downstairs in ten minutes. And wear the hat you had on last night."

The maid reëntered and, as she already knew all there was to learn, Sheila let her have her way with her chattels without a qualm. Eighteen is a plastic

age. Yesterday she could not have conceived of granting any one this freedom. To-day it seemed a matter of course.

Less as a matter of course, yet with self-possession, she followed Mrs. Ballantine into her limousine and set forth on the incredible adventure of shopping with an unlimited purse. But that is rhetoric. The reality was still more wonderful. It was her mother-in-law's credit which was unlimited. She paid for none of her purchases. The famous shops trusted her as if she owned them. She walked in the market place with a golden nimbus. Great was her glory, and Sheila, bathed in its reflected light, enjoyed the homage of a princess royal.

Had she never stood behind a counter, this atmosphere might have made her giddy. As it was, she kept her head and even took a critical interest in the salesmanship. In fact she ached to drop a practical hint to one or two of the clerks who toiled at Mrs. Ballantine's bidding. She realized as they did not that here was a customer who knew values as well as a dressmaker and had precise ideas of what she wanted. Sheila's opinion she seldom asked, but the girl was more than content with her selections. They had the simplicity which costs. They provided for every need, indoor or out, which was likely to arise. Once only she questioned whether she could find use for a garment.

"Ethel did," said Mrs. Ballantine.

It was her sole allusion to the young person whom she obviously had expected Tom to marry, and it cast a cloud over relations which the zest of shopping had sensibly warmed. But these doldrums were

fleeting. Mrs. Ballantine was human, and the fresh loveliness, the sweet docility, the surprising refinement of her son's headlong choice tempered her resentment, and they lunched together on terms which astonished them both.

It was a restaurant that at the mention of New York springs as readily to mind as Fifth Avenue, which indeed it neighbored, and it was peopled with women and an occasional man who clearly could afford to be there. When she had given her order Mrs. Ballantine mentioned the names of a few of these people. They were impressive names, by metropolitan standards, and their owners seemed to know one another well. At moments some one's entrance or departure would set the bright-hued autumn hats nodding like poppies in a wheatfield. But Mrs. Ballantine took no part in these ovations. She had greeted no one but the head waiter. Sheila puzzled a little over this, but her mother-in-law dropped a remark which possibly accounted for her reserve.

"Some of them have been divorced three times," she said.

"Really!" Sheila wondered who were the culprits. "How dreadful!"

"It's disgusting."

"I suppose you don't believe in divorce?"

Mrs. Ballantine caught herself up as if she spied a pitfall.

"Within reason," she said tersely. "But three — I don't know what to call it."

"A habit?" suggested Sheila.

A delicate problem in forks claimed her attention, but her hostess seemed an authority on etiquette

as well as morals, and Sheila followed her intrepid lead. After all it was not so difficult to sit at ease in a fashionable restaurant. It was no harder than stepping in and out of an eight-thousand-dollar automobile or leaving one's intimate possessions in the hands of a French maid.

"This is a great novelty for you, of course," said Mrs. Ballantine, as if she read her thoughts.

"Yes," said the girl with a start. "I was frightfully nervous when I came in and saw what kind of a place it was. But I thought if I watched you I couldn't go wrong."

Mrs. Ballantine looked surprised and gratified.

"That's the way to learn," she said with a cordiality which had not marked her tone before. "Watch people who know."

One of Sheila's quick youthful flushes overspread her soft skin.

"Oh, I hope you'll like me," she exclaimed. "I'll do anything to please you, to make you feel that I'm worthy of Tom. Of course you don't think so now. You don't know me. I'm just a stranger and a nobody. But I didn't marry Tom because he is a Ballantine. I love him truly, and I'll never stand in the way of his getting on. That's why I begged him to obey his father. He was furious with me and said terrible things. He accused me of being cold and scheming and all for myself. And he went away without saying good-by — as if he despised me." Her voice faltered at the recollection, and through a blur she saw her companion dart an embarrassed glance right and left. "Now I've annoyed you," she added contritely. "But I'm not going to break down."

"Indeed you're not," exclaimed Mrs. Ballantine with more force than tenderness. "What would these people think?"

Sheila swallowed the lump in her throat and smiled.

"I don't believe the three-divorce women would be shocked," she said. "It's what you think that matters."

Her mother-in-law relaxed.

"I think with my husband that you have shown good sense," she admitted. "And of course it is a relief to find you well mannered and refined. You surely can't expect me to say more at this time?"

"I didn't expect you to say anything. In your place I doubt if I'd be even civil."

Her candor proved contagious.

"I want to be fair," said Mrs. Ballantine. "But it came like a thunderclap, this marriage. I can't adjust myself to it in a day. You are too young to understand."

"I was too young at this time yesterday," Sheila replied. "But last night when I came into the library and saw you — well, all at once I felt older. I don't regret marrying Tom, but I am sorry that it hurt you, and I'll do everything I can to make it up to you."

Mrs. Ballantine stared into her finger bowl.

"After all," she said abruptly, "I believe I'll take the silver fox. It suits you better than the set we chose."

Whether or not the costly furs were meant to be symbolic, the atmosphere lost its chill, and with it, Sheila almost dared hope, went the mother's bitterness and distrust. There were no more advances.

They spoke rather less than before as they went about the final errands. But they had ceased to be jailor and prisoner. If not yet friends, neither were they foes.

By four o'clock they had finished, and the Ballantine car, outshone by none, was threading the opulent traffic of the Avenue on its way to the freer spaces of the parks. Riding downtown a few hours ago, Sheila had held herself tensely erect. Now she gave her whole confidence to the upholstery. The Hudson, a chain of suburbs, rocky fields that would be suburbs by and by, a velvety reach of golf links, shining glimpses of the Sound, unrolled in dreamy sequence. They were strange scenes to her in most part, but she felt no sense of strangeness. The city, as they returned to it in the twilight, seemed her city. The deep-arched door of the great house which chocolate had built no longer frowned. The tapestried hall and the monumental staircase had stooped to domesticity. There was even — for all architects are fallible — a homely promise of dinner in the air.

Mrs. Ballantine left her at her own door.

"You have three quarters of an hour to dress," she said. "Slip on that pale pink frock I saw this morning. It ought to be very becoming to you, Sheila."

Twenty minutes sufficed her, and she sat down in this room, which so perfectly chimed with her roseate mood, and started the letter for which her father hungered.

"I don't know where to begin, Daddy Joe," she wrote, "but it's all right! You are going to be surprised, though. Tom has already left for Cambridge to finish his course — did I tell you that he is a senior?"

— and I am to have a year more of school. It was decided last night, and since then I have only seen Tom for a few minutes. You see nobody is to know we are married till he is out of college. He couldn't go back if they knew. Doesn't that seem odd? You would think they'd be glad to have the students marry. It would steady them so. I miss Tom dreadfully (you too) and, though I tried to hide it from him, it seems a century to next June. I'll have to study day and night to keep from thinking about it. I don't know yet where I am going, but Mr. Ballantine says it will be one of the finest schools. I like Mr. Ballantine. You'd never dream he was so rich — by his manner, I mean. He even likes hash! But his house is simply a palace, and I only hope I can buy a postcard of it to send you. And, oh, you ought to see my room! It's all in rose, and Tom picked it out for me because I like that color best. Wasn't it dear of him? He takes after his mother, and I like her. She has bought me the most wonderful clothes and taken me for a long motor ride — you ought to see her limousine (if that's how you spell it?) — and a moment ago she called me by my first name. That looks as if she did not harbor anything against me, doesn't it? I'm just sure I've forgotten half the things I meant to say, but I want you to know straight off that everything is all right and that I'm so hap — ”

Hours later she mustered courage to complete that liling word and add a fervent vow that she would never forget the most unselfish father in the world. But there were tear stains on the letter.

CHAPTER SIX

SHE had discovered the unpleasant fact that Tom's mother was something of a chameleon. Ethel Hoyt had been present at dinner and by a distant bow recognized that Sheila cumbered the earth. But that was the beginning and the end of her civility. Her table talk, pitched deliberately over the newcomer's head, circled round the coming opera season and the gay life of some school friend who had married a stockbroker. Then, with a sudden transition, she took another tack and harped with maddening persistence on outings she had had with Tom. A slight melancholy tinged these reminiscences. One would have thought that he had gone hopelessly to the dogs or that she was his widow.

These barbs were painful enough, but Sheila could have endured them with fortitude if Mrs. Ballantine had been the same woman who left her at her door. But she was not. Such remarks as she addressed to her daughter-in-law were perfunctory and served only to pile higher the social barrier which the ingenious Ethel had raised. It was an ordeal by freezing, and no sturdily masculine presence relieved its rigors. Roger Ballantine was absent and Ben, whom his mistress invariably called "Lawson", had degenerated to a flunkey and might as well have

worn skirts. Sheila could recall nothing that she had eaten, but dimly remembered using the wrong silver.

Yes; Tom's mother was something of a chameleon, and if her evening hue, faithful copy of Ethel's, was a jealous green, her morning mood at Sheila's threshold reflected the rosy optimism of her husband.

"We think we can get you into Miss Perrin's school," she announced as brightly as if this were yesterday and the ice-bound dinner a dream. "It's very exclusive, but Mr. Ballantine has had the principal on the 'phone, and she hopes it can be arranged. At any rate, we'll motor up there to-day and look it over. You have heard of Miss Perrin's, of course?"

"No," said Sheila gravely.

"No! You don't seem yourself. Didn't you sleep well?"

"Not very."

"I suppose the shopping tired you. Have any of the things come?"

"Yes."

Mrs. Ballantine entered and confronted a barricade of boxes.

"Why, you haven't opened one of them!" she exclaimed. "You singular girl! I don't know what to make of you."

It was on the tip of Sheila's tongue to blurt out: "And I don't know what to make of you!" But she kept silent and had the dreary solace of perceiving that it was the older woman who was ill at ease.

"Some of our first families send their girls to Miss Perrin's," she went on, avoiding the boxes as if they

contained dynamite. "I didn't dream that there was the least chance of getting you in — and perhaps there isn't — but Mr. Ballantine will manage it if anybody can. He has formed a high opinion of you, my dear, and is determined that you shall have the best."

Sheila saw her chance and took it.

"I have formed a high opinion of him," she returned. "He means what he says. He's the same every time you see him. He's sincere."

"Oh, very," assented Mrs. Ballantine, coloring.

She retreated to the impersonal ground of Miss Perrin's, but Sheila heard little. Her mind was busy with a second discovery: Tom's mother was merely a make-believe woman of the world! She was not sure of herself. Indifference baffled her. She courted where she could not rule.

Presently her words conveyed meaning.

"So we'll start about eleven. Take something warm with you — the new sport coat perhaps. We have sudden changes at night."

Sheila's eyes became more deeply Irish.

"So I've noticed," she said dryly. "But I'm ready for them now, Mrs. Ballantine."

With the door shut between them, the girl found heart for the first smile of the day. The hurt had gone out of last night's wounds. Indeed, they seemed less wounds than scars, the scars of a seasoned campaigner who had learned to give and take. She felt, not harder, but infinitely wiser, and she even experienced a surge of pity for Ethel Hoyt. Perhaps the poor thing did love Tom. And perhaps, if she had had a skin less pale, hair less dully black,

a mouth more softly modeled, he might have loved her. As it was, the idea was absurd. Her shoulders alone would ruin her chances with such a devotee of dimples as Tom.

But another glimpse of Ethel, obtained just as they were leaving the house, shattered this theory. The type of girl who looks her best in street dress, she presented a figure of slim elegance as, buttoning her gloves, she came slowly down the staircase. Her thinness and pallor had amazingly become attractions. Under her tight-drawn veil her features were patrician. No one would pass her by unheeded. Many would turn to admire.

Roger Ballantine spoke for his susceptible sex.

"You certainly know how to wear your war paint, Ethel," he greeted her. "Coming with us?"

She shook her head and, possibly because he was there to see, nodded with a thin-lipped smile to Sheila.

"To visit a school?" she said. "It's like asking me to go back to jail. That's all behind me, thank heaven! I've served my term. I'm free."

She passed out before them and, with a wave of the hand, struck off at a confident pace down the street, a modish, neurotic, formidable expression of latter-day New York.

Free! The boast followed Sheila and pulsed in the beat of the motor. Free for what? With Tom estranged, his mother fickle, his father a man who noticed "war paint" and collected pretty employees, what a field for mischief this girl had! She was probably clever. She was undoubtedly attractive. That fact could no longer be blinked. Nor was it

less clear that there had been something between her and Tom. Was it enough to feed a grudge?

For upwards of an hour these forebodings had their way with her. No demands were made on her attention by her companions. Mr. Ballantine, once out of the city's traffic, took expert charge of the wheel, while his wife, who found motoring a sedative, dozed quietly at Sheila's side and roused only when they crested a long hill and stopped at an inn set high above the gorgeous autumn pageant of the Hudson.

"They serve delicious food here," said Mrs. Ballantine, recognizing her surroundings.

"The motor ran like a scared rabbit," said her husband with equal animation. "We've never done it in better time."

They lunched in excellent humor. The inn was as famed for its view as its cookery, but the former was evidently an old story to Mrs. Ballantine, for she turned her back on it and watched her fellow guests who cared as little for scenery as herself. Girt by New York faces, New York chatter, New York food, Sheila wondered what could have lured these folk from Broadway. She was too unsophisticated to conceive of travel as a mere flight between restaurants.

Again under way, Mrs. Ballantine promptly nodded off, while Roger, who had climbed in on Sheila's left, sat motionless for so long that she thought he too slept till she turned to look and found his eyes upon her.

"I've heard from Tom," he said in a low tone.

"Have you?" The color flew to her face. "Oh

I hope —” But she could not voice what she hoped.

“He’s back in Cambridge. And he seems to have cooled off. Anyhow, he wrote that he gets my point of view and will buckle down to work.”

“I’m so glad,” she breathed — and waited.

“I thought you’d be.”

“Was — was that all?”

“All but the signature. He signed himself ‘Very truly, Tom’ which seems to cover the case. He’s probably saving the ‘yours’ for a letter to you.”

The red which had flooded so swiftly as swiftly ebbed, and all in an instant her young face looked wan and drawn.

“He’ll not write me,” she said.

The man gazed blankly at the havoc his last words had wrought and with a burly kindness nudged the arm which touched his own.

“I wouldn’t gamble on that proposition,” he drawled, glancing cautiously past her at his slumbering helpmate. “Write! In another week he’ll be clogging the mails.”

His prophecy coaxed a smile to her eyes, but it was the nudge and the glance which heartened her. They did more than attest his fairness and sympathy. They witnessed the birth of a secret league between them. Fortunately she gave no sign that she was aware of it, and her discretion pleased Roger Balantine. He had an antipathy for people who grasped no idea without a blueprint.

His own ability to do without one found ample play at Miss Perrin’s. It was full of surprises, this school which scarcely seemed a school at all. No

trademark set it apart from other country homes of the well-to-do which dotted this wooded region where rugged hills came down to meet the Hudson. Indeed, it was certain of its neighbors which looked institutional. But where they imposed their varied architecture on the landscape, this dwelling merged with it like the gray native rock of which it was built and eluded rather than courted the passer-by. Only its loftier gables were visible from the highroad.

"Rather pokey," commented Mrs. Ballantine. "And untidy," she added, as the car wound a drive carpeted with yellow leaves. "They ought to keep gardeners enough to clear away this litter."

Her husband said nothing, but as a vagrant breeze shook down a golden shower through the sunlight his glance crossed Sheila's, and each told the other that here was a bit of fairyland for such as were children at heart.

Startled by the motor, a flock of pigeons whirred in iridescent flight from a graveled terrace before the door, and a peacock, not to be outdone, spread his tail and backed away like a master of ceremonies ushering a king. But this was the one touch of excessive formality. A maid, not a butler or footman, took their cards and showed them into a drawing room which strangely lacked a mechanical piano-player and boasted not a stick of gilt furniture. They had no time to note other singularities, however. Such minor details were suddenly eclipsed by the burning issue of Miss Perrin's age. Like the glorious sphinxes who advertise complexion creams she might be twenty or forty.

Roger Ballantine was the first to recover.

"I nearly took you for one of the pupils," he asserted.

The lady smiled as graciously as if this speech had a pristine freshness for her ears.

"The pupils themselves never make that mistake," she said and directed her attention to his wife. "You must have had a tiring ride. Won't you have a cup of tea?"

Mrs. Ballantine declined for all and saw fit to add that they had lunched at the Bella Vista, but the fame of that restaurant seemed to have echoed down rather than up the valley of the Hudson.

"We motor very little," said Miss Perrin. "It braces the lungs no doubt, but the muscles suffer. We look upon every girl as a future mother and try to give the whole body a chance."

This statement struck Mrs. Ballantine as indelicate, but she remembered to be a woman of the world.

"I find most gymnasiums stuffy," she said.

"And I," said Miss Perrin. "We have none."

"No!" Mrs. Ballantine's eyebrows arched. "I should think you'd need something of the kind."

"Our games-mistress conducts all exercises in the open," explained Miss Perrin and turned to Sheila.

"Are you equal to a four-mile walk?" she asked.

"It fags me," admitted the girl.

"Can you swim?"

"Yes."

"Row?"

"I have tried it."

"Skate?"

"Not on ice."

"Do you play tennis and golf?"

"No," said Sheila.

"She has lived chiefly in cities," threw in Mrs. Ballantine.

"So I see. But she breathes properly, has a clear skin, carries no useless weight, and seems to have a definite mental reaction."

Roger Ballantine laughed.

"A lazy body doesn't always mean a lazy mind," he said.

"No," agreed Miss Perrin. "It's easy to think of exceptions. But what better minds they'd be without such a handicap."

"And do you get fresh air into your teaching too?" he queried.

"Most decidedly. There are no fossils on my staff. Every teacher is an expert, and every pupil is treated as an individual. You have read that often in school catalogues, I presume, but it means something here."

Mrs. Ballantine scented the revolutionary.

"The old ideas aren't all outworn," she protested.

"Girls nowadays have far too much latitude."

"Not here," said Miss Perrin quickly.

Roger's eyes twinkled.

"It's longitude Miss Perrin believes in," he drawled.

"By the time the games-mistress is done with Sheila, she'll have grown another foot."

Under Miss Perrin's guidance they strolled through the rambling house. Nowhere did they encounter a school atmosphere or for that matter a schoolgirl. But it developed that the fall term would not begin till the day after to-morrow.

"The Lounsbury girls have arrived, however," said Miss Perrin, pausing by an oriel window on the stair. "They are down there by the pergola."

"The Lounsburies of New York?" asked Mrs. Ballantine.

Miss Perrin nodded carelessly.

"And Newport," she said.

The visitors gazed respectfully upon the Lounsburies. The man saw two pretty girls playing with a dog. Sheila saw two pretty girls, a blonde and a brunette, who wore middy blouses, dark walking skirts, and stout shoes, and were garlanding a sad-faced mastiff. Mrs. Ballantine saw merely two girls in uniform.

"Do all your pupils wear that costume?" she demanded.

"Yes," said Miss Perrin. "Sensible, isn't it?"

"But I've just bought Sheila a most complete outfit. I got her everything that Ethel — she is our other ward — everything that Ethel required at Ferncliff. What's to be done?"

Miss Perrin smiled sympathetically.

"Why not send Miss Moore to Ferncliff?" she asked.

No adequate retort suggesting itself, Mrs. Ballantine turned her back and continued her descent to the ground floor. Sheila's heart sank. Would they banish her from this paradise? Was her education to hinge on a paltry question of clothes? Then her father-in-law caught her dismayed eye and signed to her to leave him alone with Miss Perrin.

The twain in the oriel looked at each other.

"Well, Sophie?" said the man with a broad grin.

"Well, Mr. Ballantine?" said Miss Perrin.

"You don't look a day over twenty-five."

"I'm thirty-eight — as you know."

"Still landing the swells by making it hard to get in?"

"Yes," she said. "And by giving them something different."

"Anything new since I saw you?"

"I've had myself incorporated."

"Good move," he commented. "You're a first class business woman."

"Thanks to you," she smiled. "That one year as your secretary did me more good than all four I spent at Wellesley."

Roger chuckled.

"Still," he said, "I'm glad you went to Wellesley. You mended some awful gaps in my education. Are you making money?"

"Straight along. I wish you had kept some kind of an interest. I wish you would let me hand over a block of stock now."

"What for? You paid your notes right on the dot. We're square."

"Few men would have backed me as you did. I'll never cease to be grateful. I'd like to do something for you in return."

"You can," he said.

CHAPTER SEVEN

PROPHECY to the contrary, Tom did not clog the mails. Sheila had been a month at Miss Perrin's before she received a brief missive which by no stretch of fancy could be called a love letter. The fact that he was a senior cast its grave shadow across his page. He was tremendously busy — a grind it would appear — and that she had not written seemed to have escaped a mind absorbed in matters of more importance. He closed with the world-weary reflection that the truly sensible man was the cynic: he could find amusement even in his own disillusionments.

A month ago Sheila would have shed tears. Now she smiled with the wise patience of a grandmother. She felt older herself, but not world-weary. Life grew more fascinating every day. For the first time she glimpsed the wonders that lay behind the dull name of Science. For the first time she realized that the Fine Arts were to be taken seriously, and that Literature was something more than a musty lot of books which nobody read. For the first time she measured herself against girls born with a gold spoon in their mouths and was undaunted by the comparison. She had tasted the delicious fruit of popularity. She had even become the bosom friend of Molly Lounsbury of New York and Newport.

This last crowning triumph edified no one more than Sophie Perrin. The evening of opening day she had summoned Sheila to an interview. The scene of it was a secluded room known as the study, but which with its broad desk, typewriter, card indexes, and filing cabinets had more the air of an office, just as Sophie, clad in white linen, looked less like a school mistress than a business woman or a highly capable head nurse. Sheila braced herself for a probe into the depths of her ignorance, but Miss Perrin put only two or three questions as to her past schooling and appeared to listen to the sound rather than the sense of her replies.

"Do you always pitch your voice as low as that?" she asked.

"I try to," said Sheila.

"Why?"

"Because I noticed that I liked it in other people."

"Were they customers?"

Sheila changed color, but her gaze was steadfast.

"What do you mean?" she returned cautiously.

Miss Perrin smiled.

"I'm glad to see that you keep your wits about you," she said. "But you needn't be on your guard with me. I know your story."

"All of it!"

"All that Mr. Ballantine knows. He left it to me to decide whether I should mention it to you, and it has seemed best that I should. Girls in boarding schools strike up ardent friendships and now and then exchange confidences that they regret later. If you are ever tempted — don't!"

"But I gave my word to Mr. Ballantine."

“That you’ll say nothing about your marriage? I refer to confidences in general. Keep your personal history to yourself. It will do you no harm to be thought reticent. It’s a trait that even those who don’t practice it respect. Another thing: let these girls make the advances. They nearly all come of families with a coveted place in the social scheme and are well aware of it. I don’t mean that they’re snobbish. They’re not. Their natural bent is toward the healthy democracy of youth. But they have grown up in an atmosphere of privilege. They know that they belong to the Ins and have the usual human distrust of the Outs.”

“I don’t see why they should distrust me,” said Sheila. “All I’m here for is an education.”

Miss Perrin eyed her thoughtfully.

“Hold to that point of view,” she counseled. “You could not do yourself or the Ballantines a better service.”

Sheila wondered where the Ballantines came in, but this ended the interview and for many days she had far more striking things to ponder. Her brain was a ferment of new impressions. It seemed to her that she had never really thought before. She discovered her intellect.

But it was the zest with which she flung herself into the novel outdoor life that first attracted Molly Lounsbury. A tawny-haired, brown-eyed, intensely vital creature, this older sister was adept at every sport a girl could master and had tried her hand at some which are deemed the special province of men. Watching Sheila’s early efforts at tennis, she singled her out as promising material for basket-ball,

and amidst this dusty conflict and in the friendly rivalry of the swimming pool where Sheila, thanks to lessons at the shore, could hold her own, began a boylike comradery which on Molly's own initiative soon became a tie more intimate and feminine.

It was one-sided, however, as the clear-sighted Molly did not fail to perceive.

"You never really tell me anything," she reproached one rainy day in Sheila's room, after pouring out her own thoughts with engaging candor. "Take that lovely old chest there between the windows! You've seen me stare at it scores of times and yet kept as mum as an oyster. What have you locked up in it, anyhow — a family skeleton?"

"No," smiled Sheila. "Only family linen, some of it very old, some of it fairly new."

"A hope chest!" Her eyes widened.

The slang was new to Sheila.

"It's a marriage chest," she explained.

"The same thing. Lots of girls go in for it nowadays whether there's a man on the horizon or not."

"I haven't gone in for it," said Sheila promptly.

"Oh! Then it represents some one else's hopes?"

"Yes. I've not added so much as a towel."

Molly forsook the trail with a shrug.

"I've never known anybody who could seem so frank and tell so little. Yet things must have happened to you that couldn't possibly have come my way. Surely you haven't been fenced in as I have?"

Sheila ignored the query.

"There must have been a great deal doing inside your fence."

"You might say the same of a squirrel in a wheel,"

retorted Molly. "Gertrude and I have been busy enough, goodness knows. But I'm sick of the silly things we do — sick of the silly people I've seen all my life. Except my brother Stoughton, there isn't one of the boys I've grown up with that I respect. They're stupid and selfish and dissipated. They'll never amount to anything. I despise them. Yet I meet no one else. I'll be expected to marry one of them by and by. I'm fenced in, I tell you." She brooded a moment over her misspent youth and then, with a bewildering shift, demanded: "Why don't you care for candy?"

Sheila nimbly bridged the gap.

"I had too much of it once," she said, with a painful recollection of her first week behind the counter. "But what put that in your head?"

"I was thinking how my governesses would never let me have enough and suddenly remembered that you won't touch it at all. I suppose that comes of being Mr. Ballantine's ward?"

"He's very generous," she replied, wondering how to change the subject. "And very just. All his employees look up to him."

"So I've heard. My father has met him and admires him tremendously. Perhaps you won't mind a cheeky question: Why in the world does he want to break into society?"

"Does he?"

The other girl reddened slightly under her tan.

"You have a teasing habit of parrying one question with another."

"Have I? There! I've done it again. But I didn't mean to, really."

Molly looked skeptical.

"Of course Mr. Ballantine may not care one way or the other," she said, "but he can't be blind as far as his wife is concerned. He must know why she has gone in for clubs and philanthropy, bored herself at exhibitions of queer pictures, had her box at the opera on Friday night, tried — oh, all the usual stunts for rubbing elbows with the right people."

Sheila saw her new family in a new light, but the thought which surprisingly came to the fore was that, after all, they were her family.

"Perhaps Mr. Ballantine has never loaned the right people money," she said quietly.

Molly Lounsbury stared and then gave a sportsmanlike grin.

"I invited that," she owned. "You must have thought I was talking like a snob. But I'm not one. Truly! I'm simply curious about life. I'd like to find out why anybody who already has everything worth while should want to know a set of people who are no more interesting than a thousand other sets. Hasn't Mrs. Ballantine imagination enough to guess that Newport is as petty as a village? Doesn't Mr. Ballantine realize that he is head and shoulders above most of the men who have inherited their wealth?"

"I can't tell you what they think."

"You wouldn't if you could. But I like you all the better for being loyal. I'll stand up for the Ballantines myself the next time I hear them criticized. I'll say that I know you."

The comic aspect of such a defense sent Sheila into a fit of laughter which dumfounded the daughter of the Lounsburies.

"That was meant for a compliment, not a joke," she finally pointed out.

"I know it," said Sheila. "And I appreciate it. Don't be offended at my foolishness."

Molly watched her subsiding mirth, smiled in sympathy, and pronounced the verdict of the school.

"You've brought something new to Miss Perrin's," she confessed. "Nobody can quite make out what it is, but we all like the flavor."

"But I'm just myself," said Sheila.

Molly's brow puckered with a sage reflection.

"Perhaps that's the secret," she said. "Most of us are copies."

With wonder Sheila beheld the growth of her reputation for originality. Her father's child with her father's gift for mimicry, she knew from what varied sources she had borrowed her patchwork of ideas and habits. A copy? She was a whole gallery of copies. And yet, strange paradox, she felt, as she had told Molly Lounsbury, just herself. It was a puzzle for Eighteen and she emptied her soul-searchings on paper and sent them to Lew Pam.

But her letter, like every letter she had written him since her marriage, remained unanswered. That he received them she was sure, for his agency had never failed to forward mail, and she saw in his discretion another proof of his great unselfishness. Not by so much as a line would he jeopardize her happiness. To have known where he was playing would have been a comfort, but the knowledge so easy to come by in the city was out of reach here. It was hard to bear, this silence so like that of the grave, and Sheila endured moments when her need of him was so great that at the

single word "Come!" she would have forfeited all she had gained. Even Tom.

Still, cruel as they were while they clutched her, the demons of nostalgia never tormented her long. She refused to believe that this separation could last forever, or that Daddy Joe would fail of his glorious reward. Taken all in all, it was a beautiful world, and this particular corner of it continued to yield the surprises of a Christmas box. One of marked brilliance presently flashed upon her in the guise of an invitation to the Yale-Harvard football game at New Haven. More astonishing yet, it was to be a motoring trip with the Lounsbury girls. Nor was this all. The Lounsbury girls were to be accompanied by the authors of their being, the original, bona fide, and altogether august Eliot Lounsburies of New York and Newport.

Molly broke the news.

"It's my brother Stoughton's last game — he plays left end on the Harvard 'varsity you know — and Trudie and I were promised long ago that we might go to New Haven. There'll be an extra seat in our car, and mother wrote that we might ask any one we like, so I told her we wanted you."

"Me!" gasped Sheila; then "Oh, Molly!" and, finally: "What did she say?"

"She said she hoped we wouldn't come looking like orphans. She must have forgotten the glad rags I bought for this very trip. How are you fixed?"

"I've something that will do," said Sheila, thankful that Roger Ballantine had insisted on her keeping all her new finery. "But I'm not sure yet whether I can go."

"I don't believe Mrs. Ballantine will object," said Molly with a straight face.

"Nor I," said Sheila with equal gravity. "I was thinking of Miss Perrin."

"Sophie!" drawled Molly, with brazen irreverence for the great. "Oh, she won't mind. We'll advertise her school."

But what Miss Perrin actually thought about it she alone knew. They came upon her dictating to her stenographer, and when Molly, her cocksureness wilted, had meekly voiced her petition, she gave her consent with the promptness which marked all her decisions and went calmly on with her interrupted task.

Molly pursed her lips as they regained the corridor. "Golly!" she ejaculated. "Doesn't she sometimes make you feel simply knee-high?"

Personally Sheila had never experienced the blight, but she refrained from mentioning it. It struck her that possibly this chastening was reserved for pupils whose parents sat in the seats of the mighty, and she wondered how the remarkable Miss Perrin bore herself when she faced the parents themselves.

As regards the elder Lounsburys, however, she had no opportunity of judging, for their coming was witnessed only by the early rising peacock and the servant who answered the door. The school in general was still at breakfast when they descended from some neighboring country house, snatched up three glowing girls, wearing each a chrysanthemum of the right color, and went bowling down the valley road to the nearest ferry. It had almost the thrill of a kidnapping and, although the limousine was as snug

as a stateroom, and her new furs lent a powerful moral support, Sheila shivered in her appointed place.

"Surely, child, you have put on winter underwear?" said Mrs. Lounsbury with motherly solicitude.

Mortal after all! Sheila laughed her relief.

"I'm not a bit cold — just excited," she explained. "I've never seen a college match."

"No?" Eliot Lounsbury came to life. "By Jove, I envy you! I think I'll watch you instead of the game and renew my youth."

"Renew it!" said his wife. "You've never outgrown it. Don't get younger. Your children haven't a grain of respect for you as it is."

"Haven't they, though! I'll show you. Young ladies, look me in the eye! And now, quite unbiased by the fact that I have rescued you from bondage and am taking you to see the gladiators, who is your ideal of all manly beauty, virtue, and wisdom? Vote early and avoid the crush at the polls."

"George Washington," said Gertrude promptly. "He couldn't tell a lie."

"Doctor Cook," said Molly with still greater perversity.

Their father pretended deep anguish.

"Woman suffrage!" he groaned. "Why, the sex hasn't grasped the first principles of politics. It won't even stay bribed."

There was more of this sort of banter, but it was less their jokes than the revelation that they actually could joke which interested their guest. She had not expected it of people who did their touring in a closed car. Forewarned of the limousine by Molly, she had looked for the company of a pair of starched clothes

models, the god of whose idolatry was good form. Were these the elect, the real thing, the flesh and blood originals of the Newport, Piping Rock, and Palm Beach photographs which filled so much space in fashion magazines and Sunday supplements? Was this simple and plainly dressed woman a social leader? Did this mock-serious gentleman hold banks and railroads in the hollow of his hand? All her standards were turned topsy-turvy near the Connecticut border when, during a halt for gasolene, Eliot Lounsbury bought buttered popcorn for the entire party.

But soon even the Lounsburys were overshadowed. From the moment they swung into the Boston Post Road they were never out of sight of other automobiles, and the mechanic, whose presence beside the chauffeur had puzzled Sheila, became first a semaphore and then a windmill, so great was the press of vehicles bound for the game. They fairly crept as they penetrated the heart of New Haven and sighted at last the green of the three quaintly placed churches and the glory that is Yale.

Whereupon, with the caprice of crowds, the throng which one moment held them prisoners on the sidewalk before their hotel the next swept them forward in the wake of the Harvard team and cast Sheila into the arms of Stoughton Lounsbury.

CHAPTER EIGHT

HEMMEED in a narrow passage, unable to advance or retreat, their eyes met in laughing acceptance of the comedy of their plight.

"I can't budge," he said, with an illustrative tug of the arm half circling her waist.

"Nor I," said she, dimpling. "But it surely won't be for long."

"No," he assented in accents tinged with regret. "The fellows ahead will break through in a minute. They're used to it."

Molly's laugh rippled out behind them.

"We're here too, Stoughton," she said. "I see there's no need of introducing you to Sheila. You seem to be close friends already."

Then the way suddenly cleared, and young Lounsbury faced the charge of his adoring kin. From her first viewpoint below his broad shoulder Sheila had been chiefly aware of a resolute chin and nose and a pair of appreciative brown eyes. Seen in less intimate perspective, he stood forth erect, wiry, masculine, very wholesome, and very good to look upon. And still appreciative of her humble self. His gaze dwelt on her in unqualified approval as he met the volleyed questions of his family

"But I've no business here," he declared. "We're just in from New London and are as hungry as a pack of wolves."

"Good hunting," said his father. "Has Eli a fighting chance?"

"I hope so," he rejoined quickly. "I'd rather see it a draw than a walk-over." He turned with a smile to his mother. "Try to enjoy it this time," he urged. "Wish us a game that's a game."

"With all my heart," she said. "But I wish, too, that it was over, and you were back here safe and sound."

"You'll have me here," he laughed, with a last glance at Sheila. "I'll be round before you leave if I have to be brought on a stretcher."

A lobby more thronged than the street ignored their arrival and, leaving her husband, elbowed and jostled, to claim their suite as best he could, Mrs. Lounsbury fled with her brood to the mezzanine. Vacant seats there were none and even standing room at the rail overlooking the welter below was hard to come by and to hold. Yet the wait was anything but tedious. The atmosphere was a-tingle with excitement. And, luck stupendous, they caught sight of the Harvard squad at luncheon. It was a mere glimpse through a guarded door which was almost immediately closed, but it was a speaking glimpse. They looked extremely serious, the gladiators, and by no means sociable. They said little or nothing to one another as they ate. Even Stoughton, spied distantly in profile, seemed less ravenous than he had professed. Of the gazing trio only Molly discerned humor in the solemn scene. A silent mirth convulsed her for

which Gertrude, the admirably poised, could find no rational cause. Then Eliot Lounsbury returned in ruffled triumph and a packed elevator bore them upward out of the din.

Alone with Sheila in the room they were to share, Molly's pent laughter broke in a ringing peal.

"Hysterics?" asked Sheila, laughing too.

"Almost," she gasped. "Oh, that fond embrace!" Sheila flushed copiously.

"It was an accident," she protested. "But you know it, Molly."

"Of course I know it. You couldn't help it any more than you can help your fatal beauty. I planned to have you floor him, but to have it happen as it did —" She exploded again.

"Planned?"

"Yes — planned. I've written him reams about you, but never a word as to your looks. I saved you for a smashing surprise — he's so fastidious. I wanted you to flabbergast him, knock him dizzy, trample him in the dust. And you did!"

"You can't make me believe that nonsense."

"No?" She extracted a vanity box from her bag, walked to the dressing table and aimed a critical dab at her piquant nose. "Wait and see!"

Sheila felt an unmistakable thrill and then a belated sense of guilt. For the instant she had forgotten her marriage.

"I wonder if your brother knows Tom Ballantine?" she said slowly. "He's a Harvard man too."

"Is he?" Molly wheeled in surprise. "How like you never to breathe a word about it before! What is his class?"

"He's a senior."

"A classmate of Stoughton's! Is he down for the game?"

"Oh, no," said Sheila with conviction. "He's far too busy."

"What is he like?"

"It's hard to say," she replied, wishing she had not mentioned him.

"Good looking?"

"Yes."

"Jolly?"

"Yes."

"You're not enthusiastic — the way I am over my brother, I mean."

"But he isn't my brother," said Sheila, not knowing how else to answer.

Gertrude put her head in at the door to warn them that their time was short, and the awkward subject dropped from their talk. But not from Sheila's thoughts. All during luncheon it stuck like a burr in her consciousness. The emotional days just before her marriage had a dreamy unreality, but till now she had not realized that this haze enveloped her husband as well. Had she wished to do so she could not have clearly described him. His image was strangely blurred. It was his traits rather than his features which sprang to mind and even his traits were cloaked in uncertainty. Would Tom in Stoughton Lounsbury's place have had the generosity to wish Yale a fighting chance?

Outdoors once more these puzzles ceased to vex her. The streets with their carnival gayety, the symbolic bulldogs in the shop windows, the clamor of the sou-

venir venders, the incessant flash and challenge of the rival colors, the rollicking democracy of the crowds swarming toward the outskirts and, at last, the colossal bulk of the arena, gave her no leisure for spiritual countdrums. As they entered a breeze shook countless flags to life and fluttered the blue and crimson veils of the women, and Sheila, facing the serried host, uttered a cry of bewilderment and clutched the hand which chanced nearest.

"But this is wonderful!" she exclaimed.

Eliot Lounsbury pressed her fingers sympathetically.

"Isn't it? Rome has nothing on New Haven now! Thirty tunnels like this which has just disgorged us, sixty thousand seats —"

"Seventy," asserted Gertrude.

"Seventy thousand seats — thank you, my learned child — why, Nero himself would gasp at Yale's new Bowl!"

Sheila was deaf to statistics and historical parallels.

"How could they call anything so breath-taking a 'bowl'?" she asked.

"Perhaps because they say 'stadium' in Cambridge," suggested Molly.

"Of course," drawled her father. "You've hit on nothing less than the esoteric distinction between Harvard and Yale."

Sheila found herself placed beside this man who seemed to flavor all his speech with irony, and she uneasily recalled his assertion that he would watch her instead of the game, but just then the Bowl roared its greeting to the first team, and she forgot him altogether. A staccato "brek-ek-ek" of welcome

rose from the Yale benches as the Harvard players spread over the field for practice, and an outburst as full-volumed swelled from the cheering section opposite as the Crimson presently gave way for the Blue. Then the punting and the drop-kicking stopped, the captains met for the toss, the elevens took their positions, a whistle trilled, and the struggle was on.

What befell neither side could have had the prophetic vision to foresee. If the season had shown Harvard to possess a machinelike precision and formidable strength, Yale had displayed head-work which might well offset superior brawn. But it was swiftly manifest that the Crimson team which had come down to do battle was supreme in both. To Sheila it seemed that the game had scarcely begun when the ball was rushed twenty-five yards into Yale's territory and then, yard by yard, steam-rolled across the line to a touchdown. Harvard failed to kick the goal, but Harvard's followers thundered their content. They had scored. And the game was but eight minutes old.

But Yale's clans were undismayed. Slender youths with large megaphones pranced before the cheering section, and the "bulldog" song came defiantly across the field.

"A nice little job for the undertaker,
A nice little job for the casket maker.
We're very, very busy on a brand new grave,
No hope for H-a-r-v-a-r-d!"

"I like these savage chants," said Eliot Lounsbury, with his whimsical drawl. "They convince me that we're still a virile race. But Eli's lyric optimism is surely misplaced."

"You never can tell," said Gertrude. "Yale often does wonders with a forlorn hope." She cited heroic instances to which nobody listened, for the warring forces were again interlocked.

As the period ended Mrs. Lounsbury gave an audible sigh.

"What a football enthusiast!" teased her husband.

"Oh, I'm not a Spartan mother," she owned. "I don't care which side wins, if Stoughton comes through with no broken bones."

"For shame!" rebuked Molly. "You ought to hope he gets a chance to show what's in him, no matter what he breaks."

In point of fact, his chance came soon. The second period opened badly for Yale, and Harvard, fleet, baffling, irresistible, promptly scored. But now, with a first down for Yale only fourteen yards from Harvard's goal, the game entered a fresh and dramatic phase, and the delirious shouters for the Blue saw the struggle surge on to what seemed a certain touchdown. There was a tense moment of scrimmaging within a scant two yards of Harvard's line, a wild whirl of blue and crimson jerseys, a mad confusion of arms and legs, and then young Lounsbury squirmed from the general mass with the ball and, guarded by two lunging fellow players, shook off the desperate pursuit and sped down the field on such a run and to such a touchdown as no son of Harvard ever dreamed could be achieved against the sons of Yale.

It was a brilliant feat, and his reward was ear-splitting, but the hero's family might have been embittered partisans of the Blue for all the share they took in the tumult. Turning to congratulate them,

Sheila saw the elder Lounsbury exchange a long look, but if there was pride in it, there was no hint of exultation. Molly sat very straight and very still. Even Gertrude was silent. It amazed Sheila, and for an instant she misjudged them. Then it came to her that the code which made Stoughton wish for a game that was a game was also the code of his people, and, with a swift revolution in her own thoughts, she found herself hoping that destiny might be more kind to Yale. But that fumbled opportunity marked the crest of the Blue offensive, and a drop-kick from the field had further swollen the Crimson score when half time was called, and the cheering sections took up the entertainment of the crowd.

She listened absently to the songs, so American in words, so foreign in their borrowed tunes. She was thinking of the Lounsbury code which for an emotional moment she had made her own. She saw it as an inner flame, a torch handed down from other generations of men and women with standards of conduct which were uncommon and fine. It could not be assumed as a pose, a bit of social veneer. It had to be born in you — that was the truth of it; and the truth of it saddened her.

She continued to think of it when the game was resumed, and the outclassed team fought pluckily but in vain to hold the score. Then came a stir and baring of heads across the arena, and the sons of Yale, old and young, began to sing. Her throat tightened when she understood that this song was a gallant admission of defeat. But she felt a wave no less strong of happiness. Here too was something uncommon and fine, something not personal but typical, some-

thing which was part of the Anglo-Saxon inheritance. She would have had the spectacle end there, but afterward she was glad that it did not, for she would have missed the hush and then the thunderous farewell as the Harvard captain, risen from a hospital bed, sprang from the side lines where he had waited and kicked the final goal of his football career.

It was over and, trooping down from the Crimson benches, a jubilant procession trailed in intricate windings over the field. The rite grated upon Sheila.

"Isn't thirty-six to nothing enough!" she exclaimed.

Molly linked arms with her.

"Don't take the snake dance so seriously," she said.

"But that's how Stoughton would feel about it. I'll tell him when I see him."

Sheila's skin burned and then grew cold in the November dusk.

"Please don't," she entreated in a low voice as they turned away. "Promise me that you won't."

Molly bent forward to search her eyes.

"All right," she agreed. "I won't if you object. But what a riddle you are. Don't you care what anybody thinks about you?"

"I care what you think."

The other girl laughed.

"I might have said 'somebody, masculine gender', but I suppose you'd have wriggled out of it just the same. I believe you're a man-hater, Sheila Moore."

Their car escaped from the jammed parking space at last, and they rode slowly back through streets which betrayed their depression at Yale's defeat. But the Taft was no house of mourning, and with freshened

plumage they came down to dine in a hubbub which reduced the musicians' most cherished effects to pantomime. A general conversation in normal tones was impossible. But the three girls, round-eyed and pink of cheek, were there to see rather than to talk, and their seats commanded a wide sweep of the grillroom.

As the boisterous evening wore on and the spirits of the diners rose, Sheila's gaze returned again and again to a table half hidden by intervening tables, for it was to this party of four that the orchestra owed much of its keenest rivalry. Two of the company were in plain view. These were a man of thirty-five, perhaps, with the dress and assurance of the average New Yorker, and a young woman, quite ten years his junior, whose fur-edged costume faithfully copied the military mode which that militant autumn the autocrats of the Rue de la Paix had prescribed. The obstacles which wholly concealed one of the quartette partly eclipsed a girl of extreme slenderness, but so much of the back of her head as showed had for Sheila an illusive familiarity.

"Satterlee — a stockbroker," she heard Eliot Lounsbury say in a sudden lull.

The name gave her memory the missing clue. Satterlee! Flo Satterlee — her Wall Street husband, her jewels, her pursuits — had been one of the themes of which Ethel Hoyt had discoursed during that first appalling dinner under the Ballantine roof. And of course that was Ethel with her now. The slender girl shifted her chair, and, revealing her profile, put her identity beyond question.

But Sheila saw a different Ethel than she had known.

That Ethel was cold, superior, hostile; this, vivacious, sparkling, charming. Even ardent! If the look she bent on her unseen neighbor could be believed, she thought him a god among men. He roused Sheila's curiosity, this escort. From time to time his outflung hand would describe a flamboyant arc or fall in friendly emphasis on Ethel's. Then, as if she felt her gaze, the girl turned, caught her eye and, with a smile of mystifying sweetness, bowed. Whereupon Tom Ballantine half rose and with his gayety evaporated, his gestures stilled, stared blankly at his wife.

CHAPTER NINE

His face vied with the carnation in his buttonhole when he reached her side, but he had the wit to seize the first word.

"Why didn't you write me that you were coming?" he demanded, as if his were the real grievance.

Sheila ignored the reproach, brushed his outstretched hand with limp fingers, and made him known to the Lounsbury's. Tom heard the sublime name without visible surprise and, furious as she was with him, Sheila took pride in his bearing. Then some one started "Boola Boola", and under cover of the uproar Tom bent over her.

"When may I see you?" he asked in a humbler tone.

"At Christmas, I suppose," she said coldly. "I don't know your father's plans."

"You know that isn't what I mean."

"It's what I mean."

"What rot! An accidental meeting like this — why, he couldn't possibly object. Don't be unreasonable, Sheila. And don't think what you're thinking. I'm entitled to a little amusement."

"Don't let me keep you from your — amusement."

"I prefer to stay here."

"Uninvited!"

He recognized the force of this and straightened, whereupon Eliot Lounsbury obligingly assumed the rôle of special providence.

"Won't you join us, Ballantine?" he asked. "I daresay you two have many things to say to each other."

Tom instantly accepted and, as he cast about for a chair, Molly's lips brushed Sheila's ear.

"He's a dream!" she said. "Don't be a pig and monopolize him."

"I won't," said Sheila, perceiving that the situation had its lighter side. "Talk his arm off, dear. I'll not molest you." And she made room for him between them.

"Sheila —" he began.

"Miss Lounsbury is speaking to you," she cut him off and gave her attention to an ice which the waiter now offered with singular fitness.

She craved nothing less than an ice. She wanted some one to deluge her with small talk and give her an excuse for turning her shoulder on Tom and leisure to consider his duplicity and his punishment. But Gertrude, eternal schoolgirl, was devouring her dessert in silent ecstasy, and her parents plainly found each other of greater interest than their surroundings. Molly's hold on Tom was precarious. He was answering in monosyllables and fidgeting with his feet. Then chance sent her an ally. Heralded by a cheer from without, hailed by a tempest of applause as he entered, forced to shake hands at every step, blushing under his honors, the most famous of the Lounsburys made his conquering way across the grillroom to their table.

Classmates are not necessarily acquaintances in the academic groves beside the Charles and, brought face to face, the two young men eyed each other uncertainly. Then Stoughton put out his hand.

"You're Ballantine, aren't you?" he said. "Seen you often, of course."

"Same here," said Tom dryly. "Congratulations!"

Stoughton's equally laconic "Thanks!" seemed to beggar his inspiration, but his father tactfully threw himself into the breach.

"To think that you chaps had to come to Yale to meet!" he exclaimed. "I'm always forgetting that Harvard has outgrown the Yard of my day."

The idol of the populace had no need to hunt a seat. A waiter, conscious of his high privilege, straightway pressed a chair to his heroic knees, and young Lounsbury dropped into it with the confidence of royalty which is said ever to know that a chair awaits.

"I had no end of trouble making it," he said, turning at once to Sheila. "But I was bound I'd come. I even thought about it during the game."

She looked before she spoke.

"I'm sure your people appreciate it," she replied.

He shook his broad shoulders.

"Why beat about the bush? Of course I came to see you."

Sheila's carefree mirth was meant for other ears than Stoughton Lounsbury's.

"Do you drive at everything football fashion?" she queried.

"Everything I want."

It was almost with relief that she heard a rumbled summons from Tom.

"Yes?" she said, yielding him a wintry three-quarters glimpse of her face.

"You might as well make up your mind to listen to me," he warned in an impassioned undertone. "I'm going to stick till you do."

The persistent Stoughton spared her a reply.

"Are you two related?" he asked, leaning forward.

For once Sheila was at a loss, but Tom rose to the emergency with astonishing dash.

"Oh, yes," he said. "But it's one of those relationships that are difficult to explain."

"Distant, you mean?"

"Distant seems to describe it. I find it hard to believe that we are related at all."

"You certainly don't look alike. But perhaps it's not a blood relationship?"

Sheila recovered her power of speech.

"No," she said. "Only by marriage."

Obviously dazed, Tom suffered himself to be recaptured by Molly, and the field was Stoughton's once more.

"Why haven't we met before?" he asked.

"I'm a very obscure person."

"You won't be after your début," he predicted. "I'm in luck to get an early view. But I wish I'd known Ballantine sooner. I've missed a lot."

"Yes," she agreed. "He's well worth knowing."

Young Lounsbury smiled.

"I'm sure he is if you think so," he rejoined. "But it's the chance I might have had to know you that I had in mind when I spoke. I understand his father is your guardian?"

"I'm one of his problems."

He laughed at her way of putting it.

"You can't have given him many sleepless nights."

"I hope not," she said, with one of her fluent changes of expression. "I respect him too much. He's every inch a man."

"He must be. Such concerns as Ballantine and Hoyt don't build themselves. It's a wonderful organization. Every branch I've seen is located in just the right spot and run in just the right way. And what pretty girls he employs!"

"They do seem to average high in looks."

"Why, every shop is a beauty show! But I should think he'd lose a lot of them through marriage."

"I believe that is one of the worries of the business," she said. "But talk to me about football. How does one 'make' the 'Varsity?'"

He protested that he would rather talk about her, but under her questioning he sketched the evolution of such an eleven as had been victorious to-day. He was impersonal throughout, but while he spoke always of the team, she ever pictured him as one of its units. He too had known the grinding toil, the iron discipline, the rigid subordination of self. To 'make' the 'Varsity' acquired a wider meaning. She saw that it had also to do with the making of a man. And Stoughton Lounsbury at once seemed more mature.

Tom's harassed undertone recalled her.

"Still here!" he said doggedly. "Are you ready to listen?"

A glance convinced her that it was time.

"Do stop scowling," she warned. "They'll begin to notice."

"I don't care what they notice. They're nothing to me. You've deviled me long enough, Sheila. I deserve some of it, perhaps, but —" He checked himself and rose with the Lounsburys.

"The noise here is giving mother a headache," Molly explained. "We're going to try the mezzanine." Her reluctance was plain, and a male less preoccupied than Tom would have felt the flattery of her smile as she added, "I don't suppose we can keep you from your friends any longer?" and extended her hand.

He gripped her fingers convulsively and made the round of the party like a somnambulist till he again reached Sheila, when his glazed vision cleared in an incandescent flame.

"There's just one thing to think," he said caustically as they moved toward the door. "Your new friends have given you a bad case of swelled head."

He had her undivided attention at last.

"At least they are *my* friends," she flashed. "But you know there isn't a word of truth in what you say. And you know you're in the wrong, only, instead of admitting it, you try to throw the blame on me."

"A fat chance I've had so far to admit anything!" he retorted.

Which was unanswerable. She had not meant to deny him a hearing altogether. This abrupt exodus from the restaurant had taken her by surprise.

"Perhaps later —"

"That's the talk," he whipped in. "I'll hunt you up as soon as I can get rid of Ethel and the Satterlees. They're motoring back to New York to-night and will be starting soon. Here they come now!"

Ethel, who was in the lead, so timed her advance as to reach the exit with Sheila, to whom she offered her hand with an ingratiating smile.

"So glad," she murmured, leaving the precise cause of her joy unstated. "You gave Tom such a surprise. But let me present my dear friends, the Satterlees. You must have heard me speak of them. Flo, I want you to know Sheila Moore. Miss Moore — Mr. Satterlee."

The dear Satterlees professed their delight with eyes questing eagerly toward the Lounsburies ahead. Then the congestion brought both groups to a standstill, and Eliot Lounsbury, finding the broker at elbow, gave him a nod of recognition and dropped a comment on the crush. It was a narrow opening, but it sufficed Mr. Satterlee, while his wife, with an enterprise worthy of her cloth, promptly brought up her reserves and in another moment the position was stormed. It now developed that the mezzanine was likewise the goal of the Satterlee party. Ethel herself avowed it, the capable Flo threw in a word of corroboration and her husband, alert to his cue, scored the folly of setting out for New York till the Post Road traffic had lightened.

Tom plucked at Sheila's sleeve.

"Can't we lose the whole outfit on the way up?" he petitioned. "It would be easy."

"Probably," she said. "But we won't, Tom, and you know why."

"Too much cheek for one evening, eh? Well, at any rate, Ethel has her talons in the peerless Stoughton, and I shan't have his competition upstairs."

She threw him a smile, and with his answering smile

they were magically transported to mid-September and the days when Lounsbury was merely a name in the public prints and Ethel Hoyt was naught.

The mezzanine was not an ideal spot for a tryst, but they contrived a desert isle for two on a lounge apart from the others.

"I want to explain about to-night," he said at once. "Ethel —"

"Don't mention her. I see through her manoeuvres."

"But I can't have you think I met her by appointment. I simply ran into her out at the Bowl after the game. I expected to go straight back to Boston, but the Satterlees had booked a table here at the Taft and insisted on my coming along. I won't pretend that I had to be dragged. I like them in a way. And I like Ethel. We've grown up together like brother and sister — played and scrapped — and I know her good points as well as her bad. She's one of the busiest little climbers who ever thumbed the Social Register, but when I've said that I've said the worst. You'll take to her in spite of it when you get acquainted."

"Let's don't talk about her."

"I won't. I want to talk about ourselves — to tell you what I somehow couldn't write. I admit I went up in the air like a fool that last morning in New York, and I'm sorry for it. I admit I've acted like a bear with a sore head since, and I'm sorry for that also. But it was a tough proposition I had put up to me, Sheila."

"Yes," she assented. "But it was hard for me too. I felt that I had bound myself to a stranger."

And, after all, I had. I don't know you even yet, Tom. And you don't know me."

"I know I love you," he said, as if that comprehended all things.

"And I love you," she replied. "Stranger or not, it doesn't matter."

His eyes took possession of her anew.

"I don't know what I was thinking of to give in to that whim of yours as I did," he declared. "I ought to have followed my own judgment — carried you off by force if necessary. I've half a mind to do it now. You're my wife — you belong to me — I want you."

Sheila was not alarmed by her cave man.

"You'd be sorry to-morrow."

"Never!"

"Yes, you would, Tom. And you'd despise me for having been so weak as to listen to you. I don't ever want it said that your marriage was a mistake, that I ruined your career. And, after all, we haven't so long to wait."

"Don't you call half a year long?"

"But it's less than six months to commencement, several days less."

His face brightened.

"You're keeping track of the time?"

"Yes."

"You do love me, don't you?"

"I can't tell you how much."

They swore eternal fealty with a look.

"If I could only kiss you!" he said. "Can't we somehow — "

"You know we can't."

"Would you like it if we could?"

"Dearly."

"Oh, this is Hades!" he groaned. "Here we are — husband and wife — and I can't even talk to you in private. I have to take my chance with another man and not on equal terms at that, for his mother is the chaperon. She keeps glancing over here as if she had sized me up as a criminal."

"I'm just a schoolgirl in her eyes, and she feels responsible. We mustn't stay here, Tom. But before we go I want to ask you a question. Why aren't you and Stoughton Lounsbury friends?"

"Friends!" he repeated with a touch of bitterness. "We've never exchanged a word till to-night."

"What has kept you apart?"

"One of the songs they were roaring downstairs is as good an answer as any. It's the Way we Have at Old Harvard. The place is full of sets, and his set isn't mine."

"Why shouldn't his set be yours? Didn't you have the same chance as freshmen to make friends?"

"Not by a long chalk! I prepared for college in the public schools. It was one of father's fixed ideas. Be democratic — mix with everybody — the common people are the backbone of the nation — and all that. He meant well, but it was no way to enter Harvard. I went up there without knowing a soul. Lounsbury came down from Exeter with a bunch of fellows who all knew and boosted one another. I'm not saying that he needed anything of the kind. He didn't. He'd be one of the big men of the class if his name were plain John Smith, for he's a wizard at football as you saw to-day."

"I wish that it had been you," she said impulsively.

"Oh, I'm content with my lot," he rejoined. "I wasn't in the beginning. I hated Harvard. But I'm as loyal as anybody now. I don't envy Lounsbury his friends — I've friends of my own. And I don't envy him his headlines. He's had to cut out many a good time for a little newspaper glory."

On the whole it seemed best not to explain that she had meant something far different. It would have the air of sitting in judgment when what she really wanted was to sit at his feet. She longed to see him as she first saw him — flawless and infallible — the lord of her mind as well as of her senses.

But, curiously, she had to look into the face of Molly Lounsbury to evoke this paragon. Back in their room an hour later, she showered her with questions which Sheila answered or parried with a growing dismay.

"I don't know why he made such a strong impression on me," she confessed finally from her pillow. "It wasn't anything in particular that he said or did. I don't understand it at all."

Sheila understood it perfectly.

"Through with the light?" she asked, controlling her voice, and at the girl's dextrous nod, extinguished the reading lamp between their beds.

"Has he ever had a tragedy in his life?" queried Molly from the darkness.

"Not that I've heard of."

"He seemed to have something sad at the back of his eyes as I talked with him."

Sheila felt that, by all sacred in friendship, she must undeceive her.

"His wits were wool-gathering," she said. "He was probably thinking about some one else."

"You're not flattering. But is there — some one else?"

"Yes. I haven't the right to mention her name."

The long stillness was broken by a little sigh.

"Of course it's the Hoyt girl," she said. "I remember how she looked at him in the restaurant. What a pity!"

CHAPTER TEN

A FEW minutes after her return to the cloistral peace of the house on the Hudson, Sheila, pink and short of breath from a run upstairs, confronted Miss Perrin in the study.

"I have come to tell you that I was with my husband in New Haven," she said.

Sophie Perrin disapproved of strong emotion — it produced wrinkles ; but her eyebrows shot up in spite of her at the abrupt confession and, motioning her to a seat, she gave the girl and herself a moment's grace.

"Now?" she said.

Sheila suddenly felt and looked a culprit.

"Of course I will tell you all that happened, Miss Perrin, if you insist," she said, "but — well, part of it would be hard to tell."

"Begin at the beginning," directed Sophie crisply. "Where did this — reunion take place?"

"At the Hotel Taft. We stayed overnight at the Taft, you know."

"Go on, please."

"He came to our table while we were at dinner. Neither of us had any idea that we were in New Haven."

"I daresay!"

"I mean that the other was in New Haven," she corrected herself, becoming pinker. "Mr. Lounsbury asked Tom to join us, and he did. But we said very little to each other then. He sat between me and Molly and, as Stoughton Lounsbury was on my other side —"

"Omit irrelevant details."

"I'll try to," said Sheila meekly. "By and by we went to the mezzanine. I forgot to mention that Ethel Hoyt and some friends of hers were in the restaurant, but they were and went upstairs with us, and that gave Tom and me a chance to talk by ourselves. We — but you must surely know about what we would say to each other, Miss Perrin."

"Yes," said Sophie. "I'm fairly intelligent. Continue."

"But that's all."

"All!"

"Yes, Miss Perrin. And I hope that you don't feel I in any way broke my word to Mr. Ballantine. We were in plain sight of Mrs. Lounsbury all the time."

Sophie gazed at her fixedly and then, without answering, fled across the room to a water carafe and quenched an abnormal thirst.

"I'm sure Mr. Ballantine will understand," she said presently over her shoulder. "He's refreshingly human."

"Ought I to write him about it?"

Miss Perrin, once more composed, came back to her businesslike chair behind her businesslike desk.

"Don't write things you can say better face to

face," she advised. "If Mr. Ballantine wishes your version, give it to him during the holidays. But I doubt if he will question Mrs. Eliot Lounsbury's standing as a chaperon."

There was a smile in her voice which Sheila answered with her eyes, but her face as quickly mirrored another thought.

"I haven't heard that I am expected in New York for the holidays," she said slowly. "They'd naturally dread my coming. Perhaps they've decided to keep me here — that is, if I may stay here?"

"Indeed you may," said Sophie, touched by her tone. "And very glad I'd be to have you. After Christmas we might even take a run down South for golf."

"Miss Perrin!" she exclaimed. "I'm so — so grateful! And proud! I shall love you always for saying that."

The older woman rustled her papers and became dryly matter of fact.

"I'll suggest it to Mr. Ballantine," she said with a nod of dismissal.

The upshot was a letter to Sheila herself, not from Roger Ballantine, but from his wife; a letter which gushed the milk of human kindness and glowed with Christmas cheer. They awaited her coming with eagerness, it seemed. She must feel that their home was her home and that nobody — the word was underscored — *nobody* would be more welcome. Would she let them know the exact day of her coming? And her train? A postscript alluded to the meeting at the Hotel Taft which Tom had briefly reported and Ethel described in colorful detail.

Ethel had been won by Sheila it would appear. And charmed by the Lounsburys.

The girl did not trouble herself with the underlying motives of this epistle. Miss Perrin's prior invitation, the Lounsbury name, Ethel's besetting ambition, Mrs. Ballantine's curiosity, her husband's fairmindedness, any or all of these factors may have inspired it. What absorbed her was the startling truth that she no longer cared to go. Not so long since she would have danced with joy at the news that she and Tom were to spend the holidays together. Now she longed to slip away somewhere in the sane company of Miss Perrin and probe the mystery of that singular organ, her heart. The farther the New Haven episode dropped into perspective, the clearer she perceived that there were two Sheila Moores. One was a creature of feeling who gladly owned Tom for master. The other was a passionless being who saw him as a mere boy, heedless, self-centered, immature. Every letter from him — and he had become a constant correspondent — added significant touches to this portrait and shadows to her doubt. Then the other Sheila in contrite haste would evoke his outer semblance, the endearing, flesh-and-blood Tom who swayed her senses, and she would laugh at her brooding fancies — and brood again.

She went down by an afternoon train with the Lounsbury sisters and several other girls, all under the chaperonage of a teacher acutely conscious of her responsibility. Sheila, diverted by her precautions, wondered what her expression would be were she to hear that one of her charges had lived a year alone in a seaside boarding house, gone daily to work in a

store, served thousands of the dangerous sex, contracted a secret marriage, and even now — guarded like a nun — was on her way to meet her husband.

But the thought of Molly at her side damped the faint humor of the situation. She would have liked to be frank with this girl who was herself so open, and whose friendship she valued above any she had known. Would her affection perish when she learned the whole truth about Tom Ballantine? In the final revelation would the memory of that bedtime talk after the game rise like a flaming sword between them? Would her own silence at the mention of Ethel seem as contemptible as a lie? It was a tortuous path to happiness in which Daddy Joe had set her feet. The windings of the labyrinth began to frighten her.

Roger Ballantine met her at the Grand Central Station. He looked very tall and broad and, in his rough-hewn way, very distinguished as he awaited her at the barrier, and her former awe of him returned in full measure. But his handclasp was reassuring.

"Nothing wrong with your health, I see," he greeted her. "That games-mistress evidently earns her pay."

"Indeed she does," said Sheila. "I've discovered scores of muscles I never suspected when I was clerking."

"That chapter hasn't slipped your mind yet?"

"No," she smiled.

"How about your baggage?"

"It came down by an earlier train — checked through to the house."

"Collect?"

"Prepaid."

"The mental reactions are all right too, aren't they? Tom's specialty is C. O. D. I expected to meet him now, but there's been another wreck on the New Haven road."

"A wreck!"

"Only a freight. But it has upset the schedule, and his train is an hour late. I want to run down to the plant while we're waiting."

He took her traveling bag in one hand and tucked the other under her arm as they passed through the crowd. It was the first civility of the kind he had ever paid her, and she realized that he meant it for a sign that their relations had entered a new status. With the same tacit deference he helped her into the car and, tossing the one word "Factory!" to the chauffeur, climbed in beside her, and they struck down through the tenements of the East Side. He was silent as they drove, but she knew it for the silence of a man who talked less than he thought and wrought. Presently the aroma of melted chocolate drifted through the open wind-shield, and Roger Ballantine turned his head.

"Get it?" he asked.

"Yes," she said. "Advertises itself, doesn't it?"

"In this neighborhood at any rate," he assented. "Whenever there's a breeze, you can smell it for blocks."

They drew up before the entrance of a great building of yellowish brick, with Ballantine & Hoyt stretching in huge letters across its severely practical façade.

"I won't be long," he said, dismounting. "I'm only here for a few figures from the head bookkeeper."

"May I come in?" asked Sheila.

He stared.

"You'd like to see the place?"

"Very much. I've wanted to for a long time."

"How long a time?"

"A year at least."

"Hop out," he said.

She followed him to an elevator and thence, through ranks of desks and typewriters, to his private office, where he left her. It was a plain room, not large, and its only decorations were a calendar and a series of framed photographs illustrating the culture of the cocoa bean in Trinidad and Ecuador. She saw cocoa growing in its fantastic pods, cocoa being gathered by scantily clothed blacks, cocoa in process of drying and packing for shipment. It was all exotic, picturesque and, to her mind, romantic. She had somehow never pictured the tropics as part of Roger Ballantine's background.

"Starting with the raw material, eh?" he said, re-appearing. "So did I."

"Do you mean that you lived down there?"

"Five years of my early twenties. Hoyt went through it too — married there, in fact. It was cocoa that led me into the candy business. I wanted a wider market."

They set off on a rapid round of a plant which in every last detail fulfilled its published claim of a model factory. But while Roger Ballantine took obvious pride in the airy workrooms and white-clad workers who moulded and dipped and made seductive the sweets of which his companion had sold so many pounds, it was clearly the berries from the tropics which held first place in his regard. He would let her

miss nothing of the process of sorting and roasting and grinding of his product. It was cocoa which in his eyes redeemed the B & H candies and the B & H chain from triviality. Cocoa as a foodstuff, cocoa as a boon to mankind, cocoa as a gospel dwarfed the system he had organized and the fortune he had amassed.

"Why, it's even putting heart into the poor devils in the trenches," he declared. "We're exporting three or four times as much as we did before the war."

Sheila felt the contagion of his zeal.

"It's believing in something that counts, isn't it?"

"Every time."

"It would do all your employees good to see the factory. I could have doubled my sales if I'd known what I've just learned."

"Oh, your sales record was A-1," he said.

She reëntered the car weakly. If he had looked up that part of her past, what else might he not have tried to explore? But his manner disarmed her fear, and when he spoke again it was of Tom.

"The boy isn't as keen about cocoa as I am," he said. "In fact, barring you, I don't know of anything that he is keen about. But matrimony isn't a profession except for polygamists, and if he doesn't hit on his own line by summer, into the factory he goes. I won't have him catch the loafing habit. He's got to sharpen his wits on a real job, bump up against life as it is, learn to meet and to handle all types of men."

"Of course Tom will want to work," said Sheila loyally.

"Has he mentioned longings of that sort?"

"No. But any man would want to do his share."

Roger shook his head.

"Most of us wouldn't do a lick if we could help it," he rejoined. "I was as lazy as a nigger myself till I had to hustle for a living."

"You!"

"Yes. And I can't expect my son's energy to rise higher than its source. However, I'll see that he isn't unduly handicapped."

"So will I," said Sheila.

He did not ask her what she meant, and she was not at all sure that she could have answered clearly if he had. Some unseen monitor had prompted her that this was what she ought to say to Roger Ballantine.

As they approached the station a luxurious town car preceded them into the driveway, and Mrs. Ballantine, alighting in state, suddenly discarded the mask which seems so essential a part of the furnishing of limousines, bore down on Sheila with a brilliant smile, seized both her hands and kissed both her cheeks.

"How well you look!" she cried. "And how pretty! Such a color! Roger, send my car away. I'm going home with you and the children. Sheila, I expected to meet your train, but they wouldn't release me from a board meeting—one of the war charities, you know. I was so sorry, though of course one wants to do anything one can for the poor Belgians. Luckily I thought to telephone about Tom's train. Now we'll give him a family welcome."

"You're blocking the traffic," warned her husband.

Mrs. Ballantine locked arms affectionately with Sheila.

"He's always so practical," she said, moving on. "What has he done with you while you waited?"

"We've been through the factory."

"The factory!"

"Mr. Ballantine had an errand there, and I asked if I might go through. It's a wonderful place — so light and clean and wholesome. But I don't need to tell you what it is like."

"Oh, dear, no. I went all over it once — when it was new. But it isn't one of the things Mr. Ballantine and I talk about. I believe in keeping home and business strictly separate. I made that my rule years ago. The home ought to be a kind of sanctuary, I think. I simply refuse to listen to business details. You do look so well, my dear. I can't keep my eyes from you. I had grave doubts as to Miss Perrin's system, but I must confess that it has worked out well for you in every way. If I had it to do again, I would send Ethel to Miss Perrin's. She regrets herself that she did not go there. It certainly has a tone. Did the Lounsbury girls come down to-day?"

"Yes," said Sheila.

"With you?"

"Yes."

"Such interesting friends for you to have made! Ethel says that they seem devoted to you."

"I'm very fond of them," said Sheila. "They're genuine."

The conversation languished, but the belated train now arrived, and they joined the group clustered round the exit from the track and scanned the out-pouring passengers. Then Tom, talking volubly, appeared in the distance, and at the same instant

Sheila identified his companion as Stoughton Lounsbury. They seemed on the best of terms and in no haste to part. Indeed their pace was a saunter till young Lounsbury's eyes met Sheila's when, with face transfigured, he abandoned Tom to his fate and shot forward to greet her.

"If I'd dreamed you were standing here," he said, "I'd have been the first man through the gate."

As she presented him to the Ballantines she caught a glimpse of Tom, thwarted and buffeted by the crowd. Then, pale and unsmiling, he loomed over her, and with an air of stern determination kissed her accurately on the mouth.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE one member of the group in no way perturbed was Mrs. Ballantine. She bestowed an automatic caress on her son and in the very act continued to beam on this comet from the social zenith which had blazed so miraculously into her orbit.

"Won't you let us drop you at your home, Mr. Lounsbury?" she asked. "There is plenty of room in our car."

The young man withdrew his gaze from Sheila's profile.

"That's very kind of you," he said, mustering a smile. "But I've already sent a porter scouting for a taxi. Delighted to have met you all." He bowed to them collectively. "So long, Tom."

"So long."

Mrs. Ballantine watched him till he disappeared and then rounded on her son.

"Didn't you hear him call you by your first name?" she demanded.

"Yes," he said shortly.

"Then why didn't you call him Stoughton? You haven't a particle of tact or — or —"

"Respect for the nobility?" he suggested.

"Don't be silly. You ought to meet such a man

halfway. He evidently feels very friendly toward you. Have you seen a good deal of him lately?"

Tom made sure of Sheila's ear.

"I'd put it the other way round," he said. "He has seen a good deal of me."

Roger Ballantine roused from an introspective silence and led his reunited family to the car. Sheila and Tom sat with their sleeves touching, but a gulf yawned between them into which she at least could not glance without vertigo. The reason for Stoughton Lounsbury's attentions to Tom was not far to seek. Nor was Tom's defiant kiss mysterious. Stung by jealousy, he had reverted for the instant to the stone age. His caress was the modern equivalent of a blow with a club. He had meant to serve notice to all and sundry that this woman was his. And she resented it.

Afar off she heard Mrs. Ballantine's complacent voice calling the roll of the eminent ladies who had graced the board meeting. Their gowns also came in for lengthy comment. One would have thought it a reception rather than a relief committee. Charity had nobly covered a multitude of skins. Then in the gray winter dusk they reached the gray house with the deep portal, and Ben, alias Lawson, flung open one of the iron doors so suggestive of a cage, and she passed again into the hall of tapestries and the grandiose stair.

Roger Ballantine shucked off his coat into Ben's practised hands and headed silently for the smoking room.

"We have guests for dinner," reminded his wife.

"Who?" he asked, halting.

"The Satterlees, Prices, and a dancing man whose name I forget."

"Never mind the name," said Roger grimly and went his way.

Mrs. Ballantine slipped her arm round Sheila and drew her toward the toy elevator.

"I left word to have your things put in the Rose Room, my dear," she said. "I thought it might make you feel more at home."

Tom followed them into the lift, adjusted the mechanism, studied the gilded fretwork of the door as they slowly ascended and, when they stepped forth, without speaking walked quickly away.

"It's a trying situation," sighed his mother, looking after him. "He feels it keenly."

"It isn't too late for me to go with Miss Perrin," said Sheila. "She would take me off your hands to-morrow."

Mrs. Ballantine looked pained.

"Off our hands!" she exclaimed. "My dear child, put such thoughts out of your head. We want you here — all of us."

To which blanket assurance was added the word of Ethel who, gowned for dinner, issued from a neighboring door and sprang with apparent eagerness to welcome her.

"So glad," she said in the formula of New Haven, but with an intonation which at least counterfeited gladness. "Now we shall have a chance really to know each other."

They both accompanied her to her room and, as if to mark a contrast, lingered for a moment voicing amiable trivialities. Then Mrs. Ballantine pushed a

button, and the veritable French maid who had taken Sheila's keys in September now took them again, and her official welcome was complete.

As she changed to an evening frock, her glance traveled round the chamber which had once dazzled her, but she could not recapture that spellbound first impression. She felt smothered by the many hangings. The recurrent note of rose teased her eye with its insistence. She perceived, as she had not before, that with all its fussiness of detail the room contained not a single book. Perhaps no binding would match the color scheme.

Gone also was her former dread of the dinner hour. It might bore, but it could no longer awe or chill or wound. She even looked forward to it as a means of escape from herself. From her two selves, rather, for both Sheila Moores were trying to think at the same time. But this process, if fagging to the brain tissue, was an aid to the toilette. With their widened irises, her eyes looked all but black. Her flesh tints were exquisite. Her whole image glowed back at her from the glass with a dewy freshness. But a woman's truest mirror is another woman. Ethel, encountering her at the entrance to the drawing room, found an excuse to let her go in alone.

So subdued were the tones which carried beyond the threshold, Sheila thought that none of the guests could have arrived. But this was an error. All had assembled, and all were despatching cocktails and caviare with an earnestness of purpose which struck her as supremely droll. It was possible that Roger shared her point of view, for his eyes gleamed, but the humor of the scene was quite lost on his wife.

She was harried with the task of making the dinner "go", and her look on beholding Sheila was that of the castaway who sights a sail.

"Thank goodness, you've come," she said in an undertone. "Ethel always steals away while things are stiff. If you can't talk to them, smile, and perhaps they'll talk to you. We must break the ice somehow." She led her down the long room littered with gilt furniture, passing from guest to guest. "Our ward, Miss Moore. You've met Mr. and Mrs. Satterlee before, my dear. Our ward, Miss Moore — Mrs. Price, Mr. Price. Our ward, Miss Moore — Mr. — er — I'm so sorry."

"Goodheart," said the dancing man, bowing from the hips.

Sheila and the stockbroker found common ground in the Yale Bowl, and before its riches were exhausted Ben, wearing his Lawson manner, announced that dinner was served. Whereupon Ethel appeared with vague apologies, and the company, desperately merry, filed out of the room and down the monumental staircase.

Thanks to this exercise and the mellowing cocktails, a thaw set in as they reached the dining room and hunted for their places, but it was by no means a freshet and, after a moment, the talk subsided into a muted interchange of banalities between dinner partners. On Sheila's left Roger Ballantine prodded a wan and expensive melon and listened with a saturnine grin to Mrs. Price's description of her new Pekinese. On that lady's left sat Tom with Ethel for his other neighbor. Then came the stockbroker, Mrs. Ballantine at the far end, the husband

of the owner of the new dog, "Flo" Satterlee, and finally, completing the oval, Sheila's alternative, the dancing man, who now turned and scrutinized her place card.

"Pretty name," he said. "I didn't get it upstairs. But nobody gets mine at first. Yet Goodheart is simple enough, don't you think?"

Sheila agreed with him that Goodheart was simple.

"It sounds as if Bunyan had invented it," she added, trying to do her part.

"Bunyan?" he repeated. "Don't know the chap. Can you do the Pavlowa gavotte?"

"No," she said. "What is it like?"

His explanations were drowned by Mrs. Satterlee.

"And how are the charming Lounsbury's?" she queried, addressing Sheila, but pitching her voice for the entire table. "It was such a pleasure to meet them informally as we did that night."

"The girls are well," said Sheila, her glance crossing Tom's. "I can't speak for the others."

"Sheila came down to-day with the Lounsbury girls," put in Mrs. Ballantine. "And Tom made the trip from Boston with Stoughton. They're classmates, you know. He has a most attractive personality — so modest. One wouldn't dream he was a — a famous football star. About your age, isn't he, Tom?"

"I've never asked him," said her son wearily.

"He seems older, quite man-of-the-world, in fact," contributed Mrs. Satterlee, bent on airing her knowledge. "And so like his wickedly handsome father. Ethel and I both spoke of it. Yet he has something

of his mother too — her simplicity, her gracious charm. Do *you* know the Eliot Lounsburys, Mrs. Price?"

But Mrs. Price, who had listened without seeming to listen, made her repeat the question.

"No," she replied sweetly. "Do you?"

Mrs. Satterlee recalled that she had interrupted poor Mr. Goodheart, and with a wider audience that gentleman once more elucidated the principles of the Pavlowa gavotte. He spoke as one having authority and, encouraged by his hostess, unfolded his dazzling repertory. He had collected modern dances as some men collect old masters. He even knew Vernon Castle.

It was a lavish and, if noise be a criterion, a successful dinner. After the fish course the chatter was incessant, but except Sheila and Roger Ballantine, who sipped mineral water, there were seemingly no listeners. Ethel's tongue knew no rest. She rallied now Tom, now her bosom friend across the board, and now the stockbroker whom she hailed variously as Billy, Billikins, and William the Conqueror. Mr. Satterlee was debarred from his favorite theme, the market, for market there was none; but he dwelt feelingly on the rents and salaries of the idle offices which he and his fellow philanthropists were carrying. This skirted, however, that dangerous topic the war — Mr. Goodheart was understood to be pro-German — and the talk jumped nervously to bridge, which tapped a bubbling spring of eloquence in Mrs. Price. She had the type of memory which writes a moral obligation in water, but records a card game on tablets of brass. She had played

auktion that very afternoon and now with stupefying accuracy detailed hand after hand.

It was almost as tiresome as verbal golf, and her husband, who had heard it all while he dressed for dinner, desperately broke silence and revealed himself as an automobile manufacturer from Detroit. He rehearsed the wonder tale of his rise to Mrs. Satterlee and then, unchided, repeated it with the same words and gestures to Mrs. Ballantine. Her ban upon business discussions in the home was elastic for every one save Roger. Mrs. Price did protest, but the burden of her complaint was the total depravity of life in Michigan which she said she shuddered to recall. Mr. Goodheart sympathized with her. He declared that civilization ended at the Hudson River and that, whether it liked it or not, the whole crude hinterland had to follow the lead of little old New York. Take dancing, for example —

But it was in action rather than speech that Mr. Goodheart shone his brightest. He blocked Roger's attempt to shunt the males to the smoking room and no sooner gained the gilded regions above than he penetrated the disguise of a victrola masquerading as a cabinet, inserted a peculiarly blatant record, and began at a breakneck pace to back his hostess round the room. Whereupon the gallant stockbroker seized upon Ethel, the automobile man spun forth with Mrs. Satterlee and Tom, less impetuously, followed with Mrs. Price. Sheila, left standing alone, found that Roger Ballantine had crossed to her.

"For once I wish my brains were in my heels," he told her.

"I don't wonder," she said. "It's ideal music for the one-step."

Roger gave her a shrewd side glance.

"Yes," he agreed. "Saint Vitus himself might have composed it. But here comes your partner. Mother has tuckered out."

Mrs. Ballantine sank panting into a chair, and Mr. Goodheart, his duty done, turned a blithe face on pleasure.

"You *are* a dancer," he said, before they had taken half a dozen steps together. "Who was your teacher?"

"I've danced ever since I could walk," said Sheila.

This was literally true. Daddy Joe had taught her baby feet dance steps, and she had swayed joyously to music ever since. The love of rhythmic motion was in her blood. Even a hurdy-gurdy would set her tripping.

A waltz and a fox-trot followed which she danced with Satterlee and Price in turn. Then Goodheart, deserting Ethel with scant ceremony, claimed her for the second waltz and, that over, insisted on showing her the immortal gavotte. The others pretended interest in the exhibition, but the stockbroker hovered near the whirling disk and, strangling the record in its last dying notes, whipped on the first barbaric one-step in its stead and started briskly toward Sheila. But Tom was before him.

"Mine, I hope?" he said in ballroom accents and, as they swung into step, in the same tone added: "Corking one-step, isn't it?"

Sheila lifted a puzzled face. After his volcanic flare in the railroad station and his avoidance of her

since, she expected something very different. But his Grand Central mood and manner had vanished. There was nothing possessive in his clasp. He held her precisely as he had held the least attractive of his partners. He did not even meet her gaze, but looked over her head with a bland and provoking unconcern.

"Don't feel obliged to go through this with me," she said, as they neared a doorway. "I presume you are tired."

"Not at all," he returned, still the perfect guest. "I'm good for hours."

They circled the room and again approached the doorway.

"I'm a little out of breath, Tom. Would you mind —"

He stopped at once and, when she moved across the threshold of the formal chamber adjoining, politely followed. But he ignored the tempting solitude of the library beyond and stood quietly by her side, gazing back at the suave gyrations of Ethel and Mr. Goodheart.

"Almost professional," he remarked. "It's a pleasure to watch them."

Sheila left him to enjoy this felicity alone and passed into the book-lined room which had witnessed two crises in their emotional history. Tom did not see fit to choose it as the setting for a third and she, astonished, piqued, began a listless tour of the shelves, took down a volume without noting the title and, opening it at random, came upon these words:

I asked him how far he thought wealth should be employed in hospitality. JOHNSON: "You are to

consider that ancient hospitality, of which we hear so much, was in an uncommercial country, when men being idle, were glad to be entertained at rich men's tables. But in a commercial country, a busy country, time becomes precious, and therefore hospitality is not so much valued. No doubt there is still room for a certain degree of it; and a man has a satisfaction in seeing his friends eating and drinking around him. But promiscuous hospitality is not the way to gain real influence. You must help some people at table before others; you must ask some people how they like their wine oftener than others. You therefore offend more people than you please. You are like the French statesman, who said, when he granted a favor, 'J'ai fait dix mécontents et un ingrat.' Besides, sir, being entertained ever so well at a man's table, impresses no lasting regard or esteem. No, sir, the way to make sure of power and influence is, by lending money confidentially to your neighbors at a small interest, or perhaps at no interest at all, and having their bonds in your possession."

"Let me in on the joke."

She wheeled, startled, to confront Roger Ballantine, studying her from the depths of a great chair which had hidden him till now.

"It isn't a joke," she said slowly. "I was smiling because — because I've thought some of the things that are written here."

He held out his hand for the book, read the passage, and asked the meaning of the foreign quotation which she translated with a glow of pride.

"And who was Johnson?"

She was able to tell him this too.

"I remember now," he nodded. "The young

woman who selected most of this library — she was a college graduate who worked in my office several years ago — said that this book held more human nature to the square inch than any 'life' ever written. It's queer that you should be the one to bring it back to me. You remind me of her in some ways."

He seemed about to say more, but his wife entered.

"I know you're both fagged out," she sighed, "but I do want the evening to be a success right to the end."

Roger settled himself more firmly in his chair.

"Let Ethel stir herself," he said. "They're her friends."

Mrs. Ballantine left this unanswered.

"Do help me keep things going, Sheila," she entreated. "You have the knack."

An hour later, still vivacious, the guests departed, and Tom with a careless "'Night all!" quitted the family discussion of the affair and, whistling, disappeared. Then Sheila became aware of a crushing fatigue and general dissatisfaction with life. Once more in the Rose Room she turned on all the lights and, facing the pier glass, took melancholy stock of her charms.

CHAPTER TWELVE

SHE was down early, as on her first morning in this house, but this time both father and son were before her in the breakfast room. They were sitting in silence as she came in, but she divined that they had not been silent long. Of their two greetings, Roger Ballantine's was by far the more genial. Tom drew out her chair with the exaggerated courtesy of last night and offered scraps of tame table talk as if she were a stranger. Even the butler—Ben once more in name and bearing—radiated a warmer cheer.

The three left the room together.

"Any Christmas shopping, Tom?" asked his father abruptly.

"One or two errands."

"Take Sheila along."

If the prospect elated him he dissembled in masterly fashion.

"Perhaps mother has other plans for her," he said.

"No matter. Get out of doors, you two. Make a day of it. You've earned it."

Sheila dressed for the excursion with the utmost pains, but Tom, waiting for her in the "cold storage box" off the entrance hall, was oblivious of her

splendor. His young brow was furrowed with thought.

"See here," he began bluntly. "You don't have to shop with me. We can each go our own way outside if there's anything you'd rather do."

"There isn't," she said, "but I'll leave you if you prefer, Tom. You don't seem to care to be with me any more. I—I wish I had stayed with Miss Perrin."

"And I wish I'd stayed in Cambridge," he retorted. "It was a mistake — our coming here together. But I'm going to dig out right after Christmas. I told father so at breakfast. There's a limit to what I can stand, and I've reached it. I refuse to hang round here with things as they are. It's too humiliating. I owe something to my self-respect, and I'm going to clear out."

"I don't see why."

"No," he snapped. "You can't — or won't. You'd be content in a nunnery. You haven't the least conception of what I've gone through. To know that you're my wife and yet —" He broke off with a wild fling of the arms.

"You've not stopped loving me, have you?" She was immensely reassured. "But you are such a boy, Tom. Why, yesterday —"

"That shows the state I'm in," he interrupted. "I wanted to wipe the floor with Lounsbury there in the station."

Sheila eyed him for a moment gravely and then, visualizing the scene as it might have been, laughed outright.

"It was safer to kiss me," she said.

"This is no joking matter. I know why he's been rushing me lately. It's on your account. He's dippy over you."

The eternal feminine stirred in her.

"Has he said so?"

"No, but —"

"Then I wouldn't either, if I were you."

"Oh, I'm not a fool. Your name is always cropping out in his talk."

"Perhaps he suspects, does it to please you. If that is all —"

"It isn't all. He has a photograph of you on his mantelpiece."

"Of me!"

"It's a snapshot Molly sent him — one taken at the school. You're skating."

"Of all pictures!" she exclaimed. "I'm a fright in it."

"So that's your comment!"

"Don't hiss at me through your teeth."

"I'm not — at least I didn't mean to hiss at you. But I expected a serious answer. I must have a serious answer."

"Surely I don't need to tell you that I know nothing about Molly's sending the snapshot?" she said. "And surely you don't want me to ask her to get it back? It would be making a mountain of a mole-hill. Don't all college men fill their rooms with girls' photographs?"

"He doesn't," said Tom succinctly.

"Oh," she returned. "That's more flattering, isn't it?"

He gave a badgered growl.

“Do you belong to me or don't you?”

“I don't care for the way you say that word ‘belong.’ You might be a Turk.”

For an instant he seemed poignantly to regret that he was not.

“Can't I make you understand, Sheila?” he cried hoarsely. “Won't you ever love me as I love you?”

What he said signified little, but her whole being hearkened to that impassioned note in his voice. She felt a flooding tenderness for Tom, and the crest of the tide bore her to his breast with her lips upraised to his. There followed a sensation of happy drowning — a breathless yet not painful plunge into the unknown — with an accompanying storm of kisses on her mouth, her eyes, her throat, and her mouth again.

Their speech did not take on entire coherence till they faced the crisp outer air.

“But we haven't disposed of Stoughton Lounsbury,” said Sheila, her brain clearing. “How do you want me to treat him if I ever lay eyes on him again?”

Tom approached the problem with a large tolerance.

“You needn't rush to extremes,” he said generously. “There's a middle ground between freezing and — and —”

“Melting?”

“You'll be civil to him, of course. I have been.”

“So I noticed as you came down the platform together,” she smiled. “You were almost chummy.”

“One can't help liking him.”

“And besides, he's Stoughton Lounsbury!”

His eyebrows contracted.

"You know I don't truckle."

"Yes," she said, "I know it, and you may be sure he knows it, too, and admires you for it. You admit that you like him. Take your mother's advice: meet him halfway and be glad of the friendship."

"I'd be glad of it if it had come in another way."

"Not through me?"

"Yes. How much will it be worth after he hears that we're married?"

"It will be worth just what we're worth," she answered. "Use your common sense, dear, and trust me to use mine."

She felt unbounded confidence in her common sense now. And tranquilly sure of the depth of her love for her rash, boyish, handsome Tom. She shopped with him, lunched with him, and came again with him into the tonic wintry air all in the blissful accord of their reconciliation. Not since September had she known such hours. That other self — the restless, brooding, questioning Sheila — slumbered in some remote alcove of the spirit, not quite forgotten, yet not vividly recalled.

Her lover existed but to worship and to serve.

"It's too late now for a matinée," he said, "but we might try the movies. Have you been recently?"

"Not since I left Atlantic City."

"Are the movies too vulgar for Miss Perrin?"

"I don't know. There's nothing of the kind near us in the country. Anything will be new to me."

"I hear there are good war pictures uptown. But perhaps you'd prefer something cheerful?"

"Yes," she said.

"Then suppose we roam about and take our pick," he suggested.

They rejected two houses of imperial names and paltry exteriors as too cheap, and a third, more ambitious in architecture, as too lurid. All three purveyed battle, murder, and sudden death, and the brand of comedy which is no less harrowing. Then, spying a fourth theater down a thoroughfare which the elevated structure bestrode, they made for it with laughter and hope renewed.

"Vaudeville!" groaned Tom as they came abreast of the entrance. "We don't want this, do we?"

Sheila did not reply. She scarcely heard. Her eyes were fixed in a hypnotized stare on the letters which formed her father's stage name. He was here in the same city with her — Daddy Joe! He was perhaps waiting in some dingy dressing room behind these very walls. Or standing here in the lobby! Her glance flew in search of him, but she saw only a blondined woman in the ticket booth, a doorkeeper in red and gold, and Tom. She held her breath as she looked at Tom. He was studying the billboard with a disdainful grin.

"'The Churchill Sisters — Dolly and Polly'," he read aloud. "'The Marvelous Murrays', 'Blake's Performing Dogs', 'Lew Pam and His Six Rosebuds', — eh? Where did I—? Look here, Sheila! Wasn't Lew Pam the name of the man I saw you with on the Board Walk the day we were married — the man you said knew your father?"

"Yes," she said with parched lips.

"Is he a vaudeville actor?"

"Yes."

"This must be he, then. There couldn't be two in the business with that queer name. But here's his picture in make-up — to say nothing of the buds!"

She followed with leaden feet and stood beside him and looked on the face which was and was not Daddy Joe's.

"Yes," she said again. "That is — Mr. Pam."

"Did you ever see his act?"

"A long time ago."

"Was it funny?"

"I — I thought so," she faltered. "But I don't believe you would, Tom."

"Maybe I would. Anyhow, it'd be amusing to see some one you know do his turn. Let's go in."

She could not resist. She felt herself urged forward by some blind fate. Whatever the risk, whatever befell, she must go in. Her longing to see her father would take no denial. It was a gnawing hunger which must be forthwith appeased.

"Get seats in the rear," she petitioned.

"In the rear?"

"There are pictures too, you know."

In fact a film was flickering on the screen when they entered, but Sheila sat through it with only the vaguest notion of its plot. Tom held her hand in the darkness, but had he fondled it in the full glare of the electrics it would not have mattered. Indeed it was he who drew sheepishly away when the lights went up for the Churchill Sisters.

They were not of towering ability, Dolly and Polly, and neither their voices nor their costumes were fresh. Tom pursued their efforts to please with

a running fire of sarcasm, but his gibes were a mere buzzing in Sheila's ear. She could not have told whether the Churchill Sisters were good or bad. They might have been gnats flitting across her field of vision.

Then the Marvelous Murrays — a group of mild-faced tumblers in leopard skins — exhibited feats of strength which Tom asserted could be seen any day in any gymnasium. His mood was growing more and more fault-finding. He even cavilled at those willing and winning artists, the trained dogs. But to Sheila, numbly expectant, the singers, the acrobats, the animals, and their critic were all negligible. In fancy she was behind the scenes. She saw Daddy Joe leave his dressing room. She saw him take his way down bleak halls and crazy stairways to the wings. Just beyond that thin barrier of bricks and mortar he stood waiting his turn. Now —?

But the descending drop was followed by the white screen, and another film drama began its hectic course of villainy and love. Then she remembered that such an interval must come between two acts using the full stage, and her mind's eye pictured him moving about behind the curtain while the scene-shifters changed the set. Muffled noises reached her and once a low direction in a voice she thought she knew. At last the sorely tried lovers of the photo-play embraced in silhouette against a lowering sky, the audience breathed freely again, and the youth whose proud office it was to tend the placards displayed a card heralding Lew Pam and His Six Rosebuds.

The latter were first disclosed. Or, to be exact,

their faces were. Each girl smiled toothfully from an aperture in a drop painted to suggest a rose garden of more than tropical luxuriance. Each face, needless to say, formed the heart of a flower and the entire half dozen straightway lifted up their voices and sang melodiously of other flowers and gardens, of silvery moons, and love, love, love. Then the curtain fell and with no delay lifted on a different scene. Gone the rose garden. In its place was a rural schoolroom with the Six, in pigtailed and pinafores, seated at children's desks and playing children's pranks in the absence of the master.

Tom sighed heavily.

"Again!" he exclaimed. "That moth-eaten idea was stale in Babylon. It dates back to one of the rainy days on the Ark."

Sheila's ear was strained to catch her father's voice. Then, off stage, came the sputter of his dialect.

"Nein, you loafers," he was saying. "I vill nod var dalk. I ain'd bro-German. I ain'd bro-Ally. I'm a noodle." And, stumbling over the threshold, he dreamily stood his hat in a corner and hung his umbrella on a peg.

The humor of what followed was no more profound. The schoolmaster's dialect, his absent-mindedness, his agile legs were the plot and mainstay of the skit. After a farcical examination came a recess during which Lew Pam, with the stage to himself, did ludicrous things with a stepladder in an attempt to hang a picture. This scene rested almost wholly on his versatile legs. Long, thin, encased in tight black trousers, they had an astonishing range

of expression and even coaxed a laugh or two from Tom.

"The fellow is a born clown," he said.

Sheila missed this tribute. She was striving to peer through the make-up at the man himself. Was he happy—her father? Was he well? He coughed at intervals in a way that disquieted her. Was it owing to that dust cloud that floated above the footlights? She watched him anxiously, trying to distinguish his natural tones from the throaty dialect. She began feverishly to plan a secret meeting.

Then the Six, trooping back in gauzy raiment and with tresses loosed, burst again into song and, having sung, danced with energy and even grace. And in their midst, like a masquerading faun, skipped Daddy Joe. There were three curtain calls, and at the last he appeared alone and flourished one of his talented legs in jocose farewell.

Tom had to remind her of his presence.

"Well, we've seen the great man," he said. "Shall we go?"

She put on her hat and walked silently beside him up the aisle and forth into the lobby and came once more to the picture of Lew Pam and his clustering buds. Tom passed it with a shrug.

"Poor devil!" he said contemptuously. "I suppose that stands to him for fame. How in the world, Sheila, did your father come to know such riffraff?"

The word stung her out of her torpor. It was Daddy Joe he was traducing!

"Riffraff!" she exclaimed, whirling on him with eyes ablaze. "Is that what you think of him?"

His jaw dropped.

"Sheila!" he gasped. "You look ready to eat me up. What ails you, anyhow? What have I done?"

"I won't let you or any one else insult my — my father's friend. You might be proud if you were even half as good and unselfish and noble."

He was far from grasping the enormity of his offense, but her wrath was a fiery reality which it plainly behooved him to placate.

"I didn't realize how you felt," he said penitently. "The vaudeville people are rather a common lot, you know, and that chap Pam — well, he's clever of course in his slapstick way, but — oh, what's the use? I said it, and I'm sorry — awfully sorry."

The apology was not couched in phrases to soothe such a wound as hers, but she regained her self-control in the street.

"I think I'll go round by myself for a while," she said quietly, as they reached the entrance of a department store.

"All right," he agreed, eager to please. "I'll perch on a stool at the glove counter."

"No; don't wait," she replied. "I'll find my way home."

She put a revolving door between them before he could protest.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

FROM behind a rack of petticoats she saw Tom enter the store, peer right and left, move a step or two toward her hiding-place, and then take a false turn; at which she fled down an aisle in the opposite direction, caught an elevator just as the gate was closing and issued breathless amidst toys and groceries on an upper floor.

She had acted on the single thought that, come what might, she must see Daddy Joe. For the instant nobody else in the whole world had counted. But, as things had fallen out, her hasty plan to steal back to the theater was impracticable. She might run into Tom anywhere below. Or find him on the watch at the stage door! There was no telling what he suspected. Why had she given way to anger? Why had she rid herself of him so abruptly?

A demonstrator in a nurse's costume pressed her to taste a new breakfast food. Sheila mechanically declined, and the sound of her own voice steadied her. Asking her way to the women's waiting room, she found a vacant desk and sat down to write. Her pen raced through the first lines. To the craving for a sight of her father which had drawn her into the theater were now added such a distrust of herself and such a dread of the future that she felt no longer

able to stand alone. With underscorings and blots she protested her urgent need of him and implored him to meet her in the morning. Here her pen stopped. Where? She discarded several possible meeting places as too public. Then, recalling a childhood excursion, she named the fossil room of the Museum of Natural History. Surely no one would disturb them there. She stamped her letter for special delivery and mailed it before she left the building.

She saw nothing of Tom as she came out. He had bowed to her wild caprice and gone his way. His bewilderment did not trouble her. Yet, on the other hand, she felt no bitterness. He merely resumed his station across the abyss which for a few foolishly happy hours she had thought an illusion. She saw herself a plaything of chance and dully awaited what the morrow might bring forth. Wandering slowly up town, a straw in the stream, she stared into shop windows without knowing or caring what they contained. By and by some one at elbow laughed.

"Out of all Fifth Avenue what a window to choose!"

She became aware of a display of tobacco and Ethel Hoyt.

"It isn't so odd at Christmas time," she said, rallying her wits. "One gets desperate."

Ethel's black eyes had a hard brilliance.

"If you're thinking of giving Tom cigars — don't," she advised. "He doesn't care for them."

Sheila wished no hint from her as to Tom's tastes.

"But Mr. Ballantine does," she countered.

"Don't number two," said Ethel. "He imports those things he smokes. Some man down near the

equator has the dreadful secret of their manufacture. Are you homeward bound?"

They moved on together, and Sheila noticed that the passers-by were interested in her companion. The women swiftly inventoried her clothes. The men appraised her slender figure and then, at closer range, her modishly veiled face. She seemed to embody an ideal of the street.

"Perhaps you didn't intend walking all the way," she said. "Don't let me tire you out."

"You won't. I like walking."

"Do you? I loathe it. That's the Spanish part of me, I suppose. But the American part fights down my indolence. I'm half and half, you know."

"I didn't," said Sheila. "Though Mr. Ballantine told me that your father married in the tropics."

"Yes. I was born there."

The meager scrap of autobiography clothed her with a new interest, a certain mystery, a glamour of romance. But to the girl herself her origin was seemingly plain prose.

"Spanish women tend to grow fat," she added, "but I mean to keep thin. Dancing helps, of course, but I don't depend on it. Rain or shine, I do my three or four miles a day. It's a terrible bore, for I'm usually alone. Be humane and come round the reservoir with me to-morrow morning."

Taken by surprise, Sheila hesitated.

"To-morrow? I'm sorry, but I shan't be free."

"But I mean early — say, eight-thirty or nine o'clock."

"There's something I must do early. Any other day —?"

Ethel nodded carelessly, as if it mattered little, but Sheila felt that her refusal had sown the seeds of curiosity. They strolled home and entered the house on the heels of Tom, who stared at seeing them together, but asked no questions. The aroma of oolong greeted them as they reached the drawing room floor.

"Tea!" Ethel became animated. "I wonder who has dropped in?"

But the tea service and its compelling motive had alike vanished. Mrs. Ballantine sat alone amidst the gilt furniture with the rapt look of one who had been vouchsafed a vision of supernal bliss.

"She has called!" she announced solemnly. "Mrs. Eliot Lounsbury! If you'd come five minutes sooner you would have seen them."

"Them?" repeated Ethel in the cause of accuracy.

"She brought Molly with her. They were both so disappointed that you were out, Sheila. They seem to have taken a great fancy to you. Everything went off beautifully. I insisted on their having tea. Lawson really did very well."

Tom barked out a savage laugh.

"Too bad old Ben wasn't dolled up in a wig and gold lace!" he jeered. "And somebody ought to have played a royal anthem on the pipe organ!"

His mother glowed a mottled red.

"I won't allow you to take that tone with me," she rebuked. "I don't see how you ever picked up such ideas at Harvard. You go on like a — a socialist."

"What is a socialist?" he challenged.

"Something stupid and uncouth."

"Like George Bernard Shaw, for example? He's one."

She shunned the controversy and turned to Ethel for sympathy. But Ethel, who had anxiously counted the little pile of Lounsbury visiting cards lying on a table near at hand, now stood aloof with an air of boredom.

"Tom means that we're as good as they are," she said languidly, "and that there is no reason to get excited because they've recognized our existence."

"If any one is excited, it's Tom himself," rejoined Mrs. Ballantine with dignity, and then, perceiving Sheila in quiet retreat, called to her: "Don't go yet! I forgot to tell you that Molly wants you to spend the day with her to-morrow. She said something about luncheon and a concert. Of course I assured her you'd be delighted to accept. She'll stop by for you about ten."

Sheila pulled herself together.

"I will telephone her," she said.

"Sheila has another engagement," threw in Ethel. "She had to refuse me too."

"Another engagement?" echoed Mrs. Ballantine. "What is it?"

She faced their united gaze. The hour she had meant to snatch to herself in all privacy had become a subject of general inquiry and debate. Should she post a second letter? Name another day? Then it crossed her mind that the bill at the vaudeville house would change to-morrow. By afternoon Lew Pam and his Rosebuds might be playing in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Yonkers — the ends of the earth. If she

was to see him at all, it must be in the morning. And see him she must.

"Mayn't one have secrets at this time of the year?" she asked, trying to speak lightly. "Why, I even ran away from Tom this afternoon! Molly won't mind if I telephone her to-night. She can ask some one in my place."

Mrs. Ballantine was profoundly stirred.

"I fear you don't quite grasp what this means," she said. "To be friendly at school is one thing. In New York —" She fumbled for words strong enough to bear the mighty weight of the contrast.

"Oh, let her alone," cried Tom, coming to the rescue. "These people will respect her twice as much if she doesn't jump at their every beck and call."

"I'm not attempting to coerce her," said his mother.

"What are you doing then?"

"I am merely offering her the experience of an older woman who has seen the world."

But Tom, remorseless truth-teller, riddled this sophistry with unerring aim.

"It's the Lounsbury world we're discussing," he pointed out, "and when it comes to that, Sheila can give the rest of us cards and spades. She's the only one of the family who's really had a look-in."

Poor Mrs. Ballantine eyed him as if she could not credit their relationship. Surely this was a changeling she had borne!

"I trust that you may be able to civilize him, Sheila," she said, rising. "I have failed."

As they followed her out, Ethel put her arm round Sheila.

"You've never seen my rooms," she said. "Let me show them to you now."

It was her own room that she wished most to see, but Tom was loitering to waylay her and, rather than be alone with him, she caught at the invitation. Frowning his distaste for women's wiles, he trailed after them to a rear stair and, when they reached Ethel's door on the floor above, turned silently in at his own across the corridor.

"These rooms were planned specially for me when the house was built," said Ethel, switching on the lights in a chamber which would have sufficed for a drawing room in an average dwelling. "I've lived with the Ballantines since I was a child, you know, and they wouldn't listen to my setting up for myself when I came of age. But I'm nearly as private here as I'd be in my own apartment. And I escape the nuisance of a companion."

She led her visitor through a spacious suite of sitting room, bedroom, dressing room, and bath, and Sheila murmured the adjectives a visitor would feel forced to utter. But she was staggered, not charmed. What she saw squared neither with the canons she had acquired at school nor with her own notions of good taste. Ethel was one of that numerous company of women whose æsthetic perceptions reach no farther than clothes. Her rooms were crammed with faulty furniture and senseless ornament. Whatever she fancied she bought. Her long writing table looked like the counter of a silversmith. Her bath would have stocked the inner shrine of a beauty specialist. Yet the jumble had a curious unity. Blind to harmonies of line, she had an instinct for

color. She had made the whole mad riot of luxury blend.

"I must have rich, warm tones about me," she said. "I'm unhappy without them. I don't know why."

They came to a halt in the bedroom and, waving Sheila to a seat, she pressed a jeweled button and, with the celerity of a jinn, her personal maid appeared, divested her of her street suit, swathed her in a pale yellow lounging robe, and withdrew as softly as she had come. Sheila watched in silence and in silence noted the costly elegance of every last article she wore. She had seen such plutocratic vanities in shop windows, but never on a human form. The Lounsbury girls' belongings were homespun in comparison.

"Will you have a pick-me-up of some sort?" asked Ethel hospitably. "I have the makings."

"No thank you," said Sheila, not quite sure what she was refusing.

"A cigarette?"

She declined again.

"No small vices?" smiled Ethel. "I'll indulge by my lonesome if you don't mind." She drew a gold-tipped cigarette from a boule box and lighted it. "I keep them mainly for my friends," she explained, inhaling with an expertness which belied her statement. "Flo Satterlee, for instance, is a perfect chimney. She was dying for a whiff last night, but was afraid of Uncle Roger. He has strong views on women's smoking. That's a stunning picture of Flo, don't you think?" She waved her cigarette toward the dresser. "It was taken by a new photographer who is all the rage. He won't give sittings to every one."

Sheila crossed to the dresser which, like the writing table in the room beyond, groaned under its trappings, but it was not the glorified face of Mrs. Satterlee that held her. The central feature of the glittering display was a massive silver frame containing a photograph dashingly inscribed "To my Gypsy Queen from her devoted subject Tom." As she read these words she realized precisely why Ethel had sent her to the dresser and that Ethel was watching the result of her experiment through the glass.

"It's a good likeness of Mrs. Satterlee," she said and, with what seemed to her superhuman calm, added: "And of Tom."

"Of Tom? Oh — *that* picture!" She laughed. "I feel as if I ought to turn it over to you, my dear. But perhaps you don't harbor any rankling little jealousies of his past?"

"No," said Sheila, facing round with a smile. "Nor of his present."

She curbed an impulse to bolt, and they drifted in outward amity back to the room they had entered first. Ethel was reminded of one trinket after another that Sheila must surely see, and the tour of her chattels presently led past a window seat where, with a little cry of surprise, she stooped for a metallic object gleaming amidst the upholstery.

"Tom's pet cigarette case! He's very likely hunted everywhere for it. Have you heard him mention it?"

Sheila again achieved the superhuman and smiled.

"No," she replied. "We've had a full day. I doubt if he has even missed it."

Ethel balanced the case in her palm.

"It must have lain here since last night," she said. "He dropped in after every one had gone to bed, and we talked over the evening just as we have talked over more evenings than I can count." Then, as if she saw a familiar thing from a new and startling angle, she raised her free hand to her lips and opened her dark eyes to the widest. "Do you know, as we sat here it never once occurred to me that he was married!"

That faithful servant, her tongue, stood Sheila in good stead.

"Why should it?" she queried. "Tom long ago gave me to understand that he looks on you as a sister."

Ethel too had a faithful servant.

"It's such a relief that you see things in a broad way," she rejoined, without moving an eyelash. "Now I *know* you were not annoyed about the photograph."

Sheila heard herself laugh and then bandy the usual amenities of the threshold, but these acts were instinctive and automatic. Her active intelligence was busy with the thought that pale yellow was extremely becoming to a gypsy queen.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

By herself Sheila rehearsed the scene in detail and was on the whole content with the part she had played. Tom's home truths in the drawing room were, she concluded, at the bottom of Ethel's feline baring of her claws. It must have galled her to have the coveted Lounsbury pasteboards come as they did. She had doubtless seized the first means at hand to reassert her own power. Her civilities were a sham. Underneath smouldered the fires of jealousy and hate. She was an enemy. Then the incident merged in the major anxiety of the day. After all, it was not Ethel who darkened the future. That moment with Tom in the lobby of the theater cast a glaring light on the peril of further deception. She must, without wounding him, make Daddy Joe realize this and then go to Roger Ballantine. Afterward — but beyond that dread interview the way was pathless.

Her glance fell on the miniature sedan chair in flowered brocade which hid the telephone and, remembering Molly, she called the Lounsbury number. After a brief parley with a man servant, the girl's own buoyant tones greeted her.

"It seems months since I saw you," she declared. "I can't tell you how much I miss you, Sheila Moore."

The little sedan chair became a rosy blur.

"Do you, Molly? You really mean it?"

"Mean it! Didn't I race to your house the first free minute I had to-day? But your voice sounds hoarse. Don't say that you've caught cold and can't come to-morrow!"

She plunged into excuses which told nothing.

"But I have a very special reason for wanting you," cut in Molly. "In fact I have two of them. If you are tied up for the forenoon, can't we meet later?"

"I'm afraid not. I'm sorry."

"But when shall I see you, Sheila?"

When? Who could say? Perhaps never again. Perhaps this friendship which signified so much would know no to-morrow. Perhaps now—this moment—was the last time they would speak together.

"Can't you tell me that either?"

"Not to-night," she said, her throat tightening. "I — I wish I could."

There was a pause.

"Sheila!"

"Y — yes."

"It isn't the telephone that's changed your voice. If you're in trouble I want to help. Isn't there something I can do?"

"Yes," she said, fighting for self-control. "There is, Molly. Believe that I love you and always shall. Good-by."

The day had strung her nerves to such a pitch that she felt it would be a physical impossibility to dress and dine and go through an evening downstairs, so she sent word to Mrs. Ballantine that she had a headache and was on her way to bed. But, as it

fell out, she regretted that she had not ignored her throbbing temples and taken a firmer grip on her courage. She had scarcely slipped between the sheets before Mrs. Ballantine bustled in and with an air almost professional popped a thermometer in her mouth. Amateur doctoring, it seemed, was one of her hobbies. To her surprise she could discover no temperature, but she blamed the thermometer rather than the patient and prescribed a sovereign remedy of singular bitterness and lingering memory which she administered in person. She made no less than four calls as the evening lapsed, and during one of her absences her post was unexpectedly filled by Tom.

Sheila took his knock for a maid's and was more than astonished when he pushed boldly in and bent over her pillow.

"What is wrong with you, darling?" he asked.

"What are you doing here?" she returned.

"It's my place to be here if you're sick."

"But I'm not."

"Mother thinks you are."

"It's only a headache."

"Mayn't I order you an ice-bag?"

"No, no."

"Do you have these attacks often?"

"Please go away," she requested.

He sat down on the bed.

"Your voice has a healthy ring," he commented.

"And your color is reassuring too."

"You'll be saying next that I haven't a headache at all!"

"No, I won't. But I do think you've used it as

an excuse to avoid me. Don't let's end our day with hard feelings. I had only just begun to believe that everything was all right when — bing-o! — everything was all wrong. I ate crow for the break I made this afternoon and, if I must, I'll do it again, though I can't see yet that it was such a deadly insult. Perhaps if I knew Pam I'd understand. But you've said little or nothing about your father or his friends. Not that it matters. You are all that matters to me."

She was touched less by his appeal than by her foreboding that this also was a last time.

"I'm sorry I was cross with you," she said. "I was unjust."

"You're not angry with me?"

"No, Tom."

"And everything is as it was before?"

How could she answer that! Her lashes glistened.

"Crying!" he exclaimed. "Then you are ill — you must be! I've been a brute to pester you, and I'll make myself scarce. But first" — he leaned to her — "just to show me —"

Mrs. Ballantine returned on an errand of mercy.

"I don't want two patients on my hands," she said. "If Sheila is coming down with something, you'll undoubtedly have it too."

Tom's face already betrayed marked symptoms of fever.

"I wouldn't give a damn," he blurted. "I couldn't feel sicker than I do right now."

Left alone at last, Sheila fell asleep to the gnawings of hunger and dreamed of a giant thermometer topped by a bulb fashioned in the likeness of Mrs. Ballantine.

It was a grievous misfit for lips already puckered by the sovereign remedy, but turn her head as she might there was no escape. Still more curious, the hand which ever thrust this instrument of torture upon her was the hand of Stoughton Lounsbury.

Morning saw her restored in body at least, but she took advantage of her supposed infirmity to breakfast in her room. Then, spying from her door, she found the first stage of the way clear, hurried downstairs and got out of the house without meeting any one save an underling of the butler. Her recollection of the rendezvous she had named was shadowy. She knew only that it neighbored the far side of the park. But a young policeman with a sudden taste for natural history was explicit in his directions, and a crosstown car and an uptown car between them brought her to the museum. Her early and radiant apparition caused a stir among the attendants. They were plainly astonished at her interest in fossils. And the fossils, when she reached them, astonished Sheila. It would almost seem that the scientists had exhumed a prehistoric circus, the collection had grown so since her dimly remembered visit as a child. It now took three halls to house it, and she had to search two of them before she saw Daddy Joe. He was pretending to look at a long defunct something in a case, and he continued to look at it after their eyes met. She might have been anybody's daughter. But she would have none of this caution. She darted toward him and hung upon his neck and kissed him.

"You shouldn't have done that," he protested with an anxious glance at a yawning guard, the

sole and indifferent witness of her caress. "You shouldn't have come. You shouldn't have made me come!"

"Hush!" she said passionately. "I don't care. You're my father — my own dear Daddy Joe. If you hadn't come, I'd have gone to find you. No matter where! I simply had to see you."

Joe Moore swallowed hard.

"I'm not much to see," he said, trying to smile. "But you! My, my, but you're pretty! And swell! I haven't spotted anybody in this burg that can touch you, and I bet the Ballantines haven't either. How is old money-bags? And mother-in-law? And friend husband?"

She drew back to look at him, and the seediness of which she had caught a swift impression verified itself in detail.

"I want to talk about you first," she said. "I don't believe you are well."

"Me?" he scoffed with a jaunty lift of the shoulders. "I'm as strong as a bull."

"You have a cough."

"I guess I'll swear off smoking New Year's. They don't grow real tobacco any more."

"You're not well," she persisted. "And you have a lot of new lines in your face. I believe you're worried."

"I never worry about anything but you," he told her. "Let's nab the bench behind the boneyard." He waved irreverently toward the brontosaurus. "Some pet he'd have made, that old juggins!"

They skirted the monster and sat down. Sheila focussed an absent stare on the tip of her expensive

boot, and Joe, noting the general direction of her gaze, drew his own footgear under the bench.

"You wrote that you needed me," he reminded. "What can I do for you, honey?"

She faced him resolutely.

"I want you to give me back my promise," she said. "I want to tell the Ballantines everything — and take the consequences."

"Feel like blowing the lid right off, eh?" he returned slowly. "Well, that's a pity. You don't know how I've patted myself on the back over that big idea of mine. And, by George, it was a big idea! Look at all you've got out of it! Of course I was dead sure you'd make a hit with old Ballantine if you had a fair start, but I didn't dream what a knock-out it would be. Don't think I wasn't interested because I never answered your letters. They beat any continued-in-our-next I ever tackled."

Her eyes brimmed with hot tears.

"I feel so — so contemptible," she owned. "You are the best friend I have in the world and yet — oh, I must have been mad to accept such a sacrifice!"

"Sacrifice nothing! You haven't got a line on it at all. Why, I'm tickled to death to see you settled in life and on velvet at that! I'm foot loose again — able to take a chance. You see, I want to can that bum old act of mine and break into the movies. I know I could do comics with the best of 'em. But I mean to sign up right while I'm about it. I have my eye on a California company. That's the climate."

"California! You'll be farther away than ever. I shall be all alone."

His debonair manner lost something of its brightness.

"You don't look as if you needed a tonic, but perhaps you do."

"No, no," she said. "I've told you what's troubling me. I want to make a clean breast of everything."

"And maybe lose everything?"

"If the Ballantines can't stand the truth — yes."

"But why? Things couldn't have shaped up better. The old folks have taken a shine to you, and Tom is turning out —" He came to a halt with a frown. "Let me have it straight, Sheila. Is he — is he as strong for you as he was?"

"Oh, yes," she reassured. "More so."

"And you?"

A picture with a dominant note of yellow flashed to mind.

"I love him," she said fervently.

Her father's face cleared.

"Then you do need a tonic!"

Sheila's eyes lit with a martyr's fire.

"I've done you a great wrong," she declared. "You must let me set it right."

He laid his hand over hers and, as if at a loss, sat silent. Sheila was the first to stir.

"It isn't a thing that can be reasoned about," she said. "It's just something I've got to do."

Joe issued briskly from his reverie.

"You didn't tell anybody you were coming here?"

"No."

"You kept it as dark as you could?"

"Yes."

"Then you have reasoned a little about it. And now you're going to reason some more. You haven't done me any wrong, Sheila, but you certainly will if you tell the Ballantines the truth."

"I don't understand —"

"It may sound like a fool riddle, but it's horse sense all the same. The fact is, the plain truth looks like such a whopping lie that they wouldn't believe it. You couldn't convince them that I had just you in mind. They'd think I've been lying low, waiting for the marriage to come out — a new kind of grafter."

"Never! Why, I'd swear —"

"To my thoughts? A lot of good that would do! Or my oath, either! No; there's only one thing that can prove I was on the level, and that one thing is time."

"Time?"

"Yes. If the truth comes out years from now — I don't want it to, but if it does — I'll have a clean bill of health. They'll see I was simply trying to give you your chance. There won't be any chocolate money sticking to my fingers. Not a red!"

She could not destroy this argument. He made silence seem a filial duty. And, to turn her thoughts from the present, he enlarged gayly on the riches which would be his once he had broken into the movies.

"But don't get it in your head that I'm on my uppers now," he said. "I ought to have spruced up for a date like this, but my trunks are off for Hoboken. We're top-liners at the 'Crescent' for the rest of the week, and I'll have to toddle over there shortly. They've doped out a crackerjack Christmas bill. That reminds me!" He fished a parcel

from his overcoat. "Here's a little present I bought this morning. You'll get grander things from the Ballantines to-morrow, but I'll bet my hat you won't draw anything as useful. It's a box of coat-hangers, the folding sort, and just what you'll need when you begin to travel. You wouldn't think they could squeeze half a dozen into that space, would you? I guess the guy that invented 'em must have been an actor. And now you run along, honey. The juggins here has given me an idea for a comic film that's a wonder, and I want to think it over quiet-like by myself."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

BLINDED with tears, she stumbled from the building and, heedless of her direction, wandered into the park. It was over, the meeting which she had thought would mark a turning point in her life. And her course was unchanged. There could be no deliverance from the labyrinth. She must grope on as she had come and somehow justify herself and Daddy Joe.

Above all, Daddy Joe! Till now she had not known how much he meant to her. Their other parting was joyous to this. Then she had gone from him on the wings of hope. Everything was to come right in the end as in the romances she used to devour. But her romance had not followed the accepted pattern. Everything was coming out wrong. How could she be happy with her father shut out from her life? How could he be happy? She was not deceived by his manner. He was at heart forlorn. And to-morrow would be Christmas! Then the parcel clasped to her breast became a mute reproach, and in a passion of remorse she hurried toward the shopping district.

Pitching upon an aristocrat of haberdashers, she bought more ties and handkerchiefs than Joe Moore had at one time ever owned or even dreamed to own.

Lack of measurements alone stopped her from decking him in purple and fine linen from head to heel. A silk muffler, a bathrobe and a sweater gave this thwarted impulse partial outlet, and on the salesman's suggestion she added studs and sleeve links. He was all helpfulness, the salesman. And all business. Schooled to betray no surprise at the vagaries of the rich, he took down the name and address with bland composure and promised that a special messenger should start for Hoboken within the hour. With the tender of her change he seemed to blot her from his memory. His glance lit for another customer. His back crooked. His lips fluted "Good morning!" and an unctuous "What may I have the pleasure of showing *you*, Mr. Lounsbury?"

Vain piping! Haberdashery had escaped the volatile mind of Stoughton Lounsbury. He had swept off his hat with a deference which surely no young person with a Hoboken acquaintance deserved and was pressing her fingers with an ardor as trying to witness as it must be to endure. Their absurd greetings were inaudible.

"It's fate," he said.

Sheila had a confused sense of drifting out of one dream into another. But this handclasp and eager smile were vital phenomena.

"It's fate," he repeated. "Don't try to run away from it."

"I'm awfully stupid this morning," she said. "From what have I been running away?"

"Me," he returned promptly. "Though possibly you didn't know it."

"No."

"Molly wasn't the only one who was disappointed when you 'phoned. I was going to meet you girls this afternoon and take you to some tea place where we could dance."

One of the urgent reasons became clear.

"Molly didn't mention it."

"Would it have made any difference?"

She shook her head.

"No," she said. "In any case I'd have had to refuse."|

"I wish I could believe you'd have found it harder to refuse — if you'd known."

"Why so it would have been," she replied.

"You mean it!"

"Of course. I adore dancing."

He looked crestfallen.

"How you tantalize a fellow!" he exclaimed.

"Doesn't the partner count?"

Sheila moved toward the door.

"I'm apt to forget all about him once the music begins," she said. "Unless he's a bad dancer."

"Either way he's a cipher, so far as I can see."

He laughed rather ruefully. "But Molly warned me that you're a kind of will-o'-the-wisp nobody can catch," he added, as they came out into Fifth Avenue.

"Is that your car at the curb?"

"No, I'm on foot."

"So am I," he said, "and going your way, if you'll let me. You need some one to look after you in the crowd, and I've had practice, you know. I'll never forget how we met in the crush at New Haven. There hasn't been a day since that I haven't thought of it — not a day."

Sheila beheld the situation fast slipping out of hand.

"I must say good-by," she announced. "I'm taking a bus at the corner."

"I'll see you safely aboard."

"Don't bother — please."

"Bother!" Stoughton's eyes sounded hers.

"I'm used to looking after myself."

"I see that," he answered meaningly. "And I admire it in you. But I wish — with me — that you wouldn't feel it necessary to take care of yourself."

"I must go now," she said. "Really."

"Have I offended you?"

"No, no; but —"

"Then let me see you to the corner." He fell into step beside her. "I don't want you to leave me with a false impression. You must not think that I talk to every one as — as frankly — as I have to you. We've only seen each other a few times — just glimpses at that — but it seems to me as if I'd known you always. I suppose you don't look at things in that light. No girl would, perhaps. Yet I can't judge. Girls!" He gesticulated his despair of ever mastering the subject. "They're all different."

Sheila welcomed the change from the specific to the general.

"No," she smiled. "They're all alike, and you mustn't take them seriously. It's an uptown bus I want. Now's our chance to cross."

But their dash carried them only halfway. Marooned side by side on an isle of safety, they awaited the passing of a file of limousines. From one, not a

yard distant, smiled Ethel. It was a smile to remember, and it bore Sheila company to her door. It was still vividly present in her mind's eye as she stepped from the toy elevator and confronted Tom, pacing the upper hall.

"Where have you been?" he demanded. "Haven't you any consideration for my feelings?"

She regarded him gravely.

"I have feelings which you might consider," she said. "Does being married mean that I must account to you for every step I take?"

"I want to know why you bolted out this way — from a sick bed — saying nothing to anybody?"

"You knew that I intended going out this morning."

"But that was before you took to your bed and stirred us all up."

"You stirred yourselves up. All I wanted was to be let alone. I had merely a headache, as I told you, and I slept it off. Do treat me less like a child, Tom."

"It's you who treat me like a child," he retorted. "I might be a prima donna's husband for all the attention you pay to my wishes."

"But what is it I've done or haven't done? Did you expect me to ask your permission to leave the house? Do be sensible. How would you feel if I cross-questioned you every time you moved and tried to read every thought in your head?"

"Go on," he said bitterly. "Put *me* in the wrong."

"I'm merely asking you to put yourself in my place. Don't make me feel like a fly under a microscope."

"Then be open with me."

Fear caught her at her throat.

"Open with you?"

His face softened as he saw her lip tremble.

"I mean that it's the only way we'll get on together. Heaven knows I don't want to bicker with you, Sheila, yet somehow we're always at it. And if we do it now —" He left the stormy future to her imagination.

She was giddy with relief.

"I want to be open with you — in everything," she said. "And we'll get on together — we'll be happy — if you'll bear in mind that I'm just as human as yourself. I'm not very old or very wise, Tom. Try to remember that too, if I — if we misunderstand each other again."

"We never will," he averred with a lover's optimism and sealed the vow with a lover's kiss. "There!"

Sheila traced the design of his scarf with her forefinger and launched an experiment in candor.

"Now that you are your own dear self," she said, "I'll give you a piece of news. I ran across Stoughton Lounsbury downtown."

"What!"

"Yes. He insisted on putting me on my bus."

"And you let him!" Tom's own dear self became swiftly less endearing.

"You told me to be civil to him."

"Civil — yes; but as for roaming the streets —"

"One street — Fifth Avenue — and about one block."

"Listening to his talk! Of course he did talk?"

"Wouldn't it have been odd if he hadn't? You're

rather discouraging, Tom. You ask me to be open with you and yet, the minute I begin, you boil over. Perhaps I'd better say no more about it till you're quite cool. If you would count ten — or give a deep breath?"

He did the latter with a word at the end which was not a numeral.

"In — not out," she instructed. "You're still simmering."

For a moment he held her in a somber gaze.

"Oh, I know how I appear to you," he owned in self-disgust. "But it's the way we're situated that's to blame. You're mine, and you're not mine. Everybody is free to fall in love with you."

"One would think there was a whole army on my trail!"

"Lounsbury looks like an army to me where you are concerned. Of course, the man is in love with you. Don't I know the signs! And yet I have to stand by like a wooden Indian and do nothing."

"You could trust me — that's something, Tom. I don't need a ring on my left hand to remind me that I'm married. And I'm not such a little fool as to fancy that every man I meet is in love with me. Let's forget Stoughton Lounsbury and his symptoms."

"All right," he agreed, only to add in the same breath: "But what did he say to you this morning?"

She decided that it would be prudent to edit her recollections.

"He talked about New Haven for one thing. And — let me see — oh, yes; and dancing. It was only for a moment. And, by the way, Ethel rode past while we were waiting to cross the street."

"Ethel!" The statement woke his interest. "Did she recognize you?"

"Yes."

"That's three times she has chanced on you in less than twenty-four hours. If you struck that kind of thing in a story, you'd say the author didn't know New York."

The accuracy of authors did not detain her.

"Three times?"

"Once yesterday and twice to-day. When she came in from her exercise she hunted me up to tell me that she saw you in the park. She said she thought it might save me from worrying."

Daddy Joe's parcel fell to the floor with a metallic clink.

"Anything breakable?" he asked, stooping.

She goaded her brain to a final effort.

"No," she replied. "Coat-hangers. They're the folding kind — very convenient for travel."

"For me?"

"They weren't bought for you," she said with a rather weary smile. "But we may use them together — some day."

She looked for a grilling at the hands of Mrs. Ballantine, but this she was spared. It developed that, after inquiring what her patient had eaten for breakfast, Mrs. Ballantine had claimed another cure for the sovereign remedy and dismissed the case from her thoughts. Nor was the next encounter with Ethel eventful. Late in the afternoon they met amicably before a hickory fire in the holly-decked library, where Tom and his mother were busy with a boxful of cards which had come late from the

engraver, and, sitting down side by side, joined in the peaceful task of addressing Christmas greetings to the mixed acquaintance of the house of Ballantine. It was a tranquil interlude and, save for the absence of the husband and father, would to a sentimental outsider have presented a scene quite in the tradition of Charles Dickens and of the edifying waxworks displayed in their windows by Charles Dickens' successors, the department stores.

It was an unforeseen absence on Roger's part. Indeed he had planned to return early and take them out to dinner and the theater. For reasons unknown, however, he not only failed to appear, but finally telephoned that they must start without him. Joining them at dinner would be out of the question, he said, but they might leave his check at the box office. It was like him to remember such a detail. And like his family to forget it. They were passing the doorkeeper in total unconcern when Sheila put Tom in mind of his father's request.

It was her first box, and the novelty of the experience quite transcended her interest in the play. In fact she lost much of the dialogue in wondering why any one should wish to sit in a box. She had perched in gallery seats far more comfortable than the stiff gilt chair she now occupied, and on those dizzy heights had been thrall to an enchantment denied her here. The scenery was void of illusion. Things not meant to be shown were pitilessly exposed. Things she wished to see were perversely hidden round the corner. The actors often vanished without leaving the stage. What were the compensations? Of course nothing shabby met the eye. No

fellow box-holder had pinched and scrimped to save the price of a ticket. None was underfed, none ill-clothed. Sleek exclusives, they would no doubt perceive something droll in a Christmas gift of folding coat-hangers. They probably thought of Hoboken as a place where one took liners for a run abroad. Whereupon, to the confusion of the plot — if the play had a plot — Lew Pam and his Six Rosebuds mingled with the mummies across the footlights. Pushing back her chair, she dabbed furtively at her eyes and in the movement became aware of Roger Ballantine, standing in the rear. He was not in evening dress. He was not following the comedy. He was watching her.

What his look signified she could not fathom. Had he seen her tears? Was he, like his son, beginning to probe her secret thoughts? She faced the stage and dreaded the drop of the curtain and the coming of the lights. But his manner between the acts was reassuring, and when the play went on, he took a seat next to hers and let his arm rest on the rail back of her chair. At the end of the performance it was he who helped her into her wraps and walked with her to the street and stood beside her during the wait for the motor. In everything but words he expressed, if not a shy affection, at least a desire to shelter and protect.

Christmas began with a touch of ceremony. It was the one day in the year when the Ballantine household made a deliberate effort to breakfast together. On these occasions the family was wont to humor Roger's notion of a proper morning diet, while he on his part would forbear to read his newspaper. They

were all scrupulously polite — as if guests were present — and, the meal ended, marched in a body to the library and the surprises of the annual lottery.

But to-day's chief surprise was not wrapped in tissue paper and scarlet ribbon. Though the gifts were lavish beyond anything Sheila had conceived, the flurry they aroused was mild to the sensation plucked by Ethel from the morning post. Her long-drawn "Well!" focussed all eyes on her face. Her rush of color and intent search of the remaining mail whipped the suspense to a point which Mrs. Ballantine found insupportable.

"Don't be so provoking," she cried. "What is it?"

Ethel passed envelopes of twin consequence to Tom and Sheila.

"Invitations," she said, with a neat sense of climax. "A dance at Sherry's. For the Lounsbury girls."

"Oh!" breathed Mrs. Ballantine, torn by warring emotions. "So it's the younger set?"

Ethel recovered her pallor and her poise.

"Obviously," she returned. "One of those not-yet-out affairs with a sprinkling of older girls and men. New Year's Eve? A short notice, I must say, at this season. But I presume Mrs. Lounsbury thinks she can do that kind of thing."

"But she couldn't send the invitations till she had called," reminded Mrs. Ballantine. "That explains it."

"Perhaps," said Ethel. "But it's sheer chance that I haven't a definite engagement for that night."

Tom tore his invitation in four parts.

"I have," he stated and cast the fragments in the fire.

"Tom!" gasped his mother, as if he had committed a sacrilege. "What *do* you mean?"

"I mean that it's nothing to me. I shan't be here. I'm going back to Cambridge to-morrow."

"In the middle of your vacation! What are you thinking of? What would you do when you got there?"

"Bone up my Pol Econ."

"Your polly-what?"

"Economics."

The excuse was too preposterous.

"You've trumped up this plan just to be obstinate," she accused.

"Have I? Ask father. He'll tell you that I talked it over with him the morning after I came."

The storm veered momentarily toward Roger.

"Correct," he drawled. "I'll furnish an affidavit if necessary."

"Oh, but this is serious," said his wife impatiently.

"If Tom has no sense of what he owes himself socially, let him think of the girls. It's an opportunity in a thousand, and they're wild to go."

"Not wild — exactly," qualified Ethel. "Though, as you say —"

Tom turned to Sheila.

"Do you want to go?" he queried.

"No," she answered.

She spoke in all sincerity from a heavy heart. She had scarcely tasted her breakfast because of yesterday's memories. Dance! She felt that she could never care for dancing again. As for opposing Tom now, knowing what he thought, knowing what she knew —

“But she ought to want to go,” declared Mrs. Ballantine firmly. “Of course, with her inexperience, this affair may seem to her something of an ordeal, but she must conquer that feeling.”

Tom, who had looked another man since Sheila’s answer, broke into unseemly laughter.

“That’s rich,” he said. “Why, it’s her experience which bagged the invitations.”

His mother bridled.

“If you are going to rant in that strain —” she began.

“I’m not,” he said. “And I’m not going away to-morrow. I’m going to stay here and watch Sheila pilot Ballantine and Hoyt into the promised land.”

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE return call on the Lounsburys, a mere transaction in cards at the door of a plain brownstone house in the West Fifties, was the least of the activities of a breathless week. Clothes again were a vital issue, and Sheila, without freedom of choice, became the owner of a new gown. Mrs. Ballantine saw to it and would have taken Ethel too in hand had not Ethel forestalled her and shrouded all her preparations in mystery. But, contrasted with certain others she spent, Sheila's hours with the dressmaker were restful. She was taken to more plays and a dumfounding opera; ate more restaurant lunches and dinners; met more affluent friends of the family who gathered for an afternoon bridge; attended a babbling ladies' day at one of Roger's clubs; dropped in at the weird studio of a weird painter who was doing a weird portrait of Mrs. Satterlee; and — worn by loss of sleep, her misgivings and her memories — faced throughout the perplexing maze of her relations with Tom.

One moment fond, the next irritable, she never knew how she would find him. His moods shifted in the twinkling of an eye. He seemed to regret that of his own free will he had remained for the dance

and tried to make her admit that in her inmost heart she was as eager for it as Ethel. His jealousy was a sleepless flame, and he went far afield for fuel. If her glance so much as crossed that of a passably good-looking male he would glare at him. He peopled the theaters, the restaurants, the streets with lady-killers, and, at the bare mention of Stoughton Lounsbury, smouldered in homicidal silence. Even his tender intervals were exhausting. He would ask again and again whether she loved him, whether she was sure she loved him, whether she would always love him. She repeated the word of words till she felt like a parrot.

With matters at this pass, she was fearful lest Molly suggest another outing which Mrs. Ballantine would make it hard for her to decline. But the personal columns which heralded Mrs. Eliot Lounsbury's coming entertainment for her daughters "not yet out" also noted those same young ladies as present at divers other functions for the theoretically cloistered, and the risk of trouble from that quarter began to seem remote. Nevertheless, a meeting befell, and no other than the luckless Tom was its moving spirit and unhappy victim.

In a sunny interlude he proposed a visit to a certain ice rink then very much the thing, and they had an hour or two of healthy sport which braced her and apparently banished the demons that tormented him. Tom was at his best in the rink. He proved himself a skilful skater. He taught her an intricate figure. Too busy for jealous pangs, no ogling rival jaundiced his sensitive eye. Then, just as they were leaving the building, they plumped into a group of fresh arrivals

which included the younger Lounsbury. It was a touch-and-go encounter. For perhaps a minute Sheila chatted with the girls, while Stoughton stood apart with Tom. That in so short a time anything could transpire to aggravate Tom's distemper did not seem humanly possible. Yet it was a changed being who stalked forth by her side. Gloom sat upon his brow. He replied in monosyllables. They were again at odds.

She did not ask what was amiss. That query was worn threadbare. What did it matter? There was no pleasing him. But this omission only increased his spleen and, when it found vent, the bitter torrent shocked and frightened her.

"Now I know you're not open and aboveboard with me," he asserted harshly. "That man let the cat out of the bag. You didn't run across him on the street the other day. You were with him in a shop — a men's shop. Maybe you went into the place because you saw him there — threw yourself in his way! I don't know what you did. I don't know what to believe. I don't know where I stand, but — by God! — I'm going to know."

The outburst had a blind fury. He was beside himself. She might have been his most hated enemy.

"But what is all this about?" she asked. "I can't answer such a tirade in the dark. What was it he said to you?"

Tom came to a dead stop.

"Were you or were you not with him in that shop?"

"Yes."

"Then why did you tell me that you ran across him in the street?"

"Pardon me," she said, "but I told you nothing of the kind."

"Pardon *me*," he came back in red-hot civility, "but you did. I have a most retentive memory."

"Then it's out of order. I know what words I used, Tom, for I was careful to pick them. I said I ran across him downtown."

"Ha!" he exclaimed. "So you picked your words, did you? Now we're getting at the facts. And why, may I ask, were you so careful in your version of what happened?"

Her suavity broke under the strain.

"Because you are such an idiot about Stoughton Lounsbury," she retorted. "I was sure that if I said we met first in a store and then walked up the avenue you would magnify it into a flirtation and lose your temper. And that is exactly what you've done. But why choose the sidewalk?" She moved on with a toss of the head. "Couldn't you wait till you got home to bully and insult me?"

He overtook her in a stride.

"Very clever!" he said. "But you haven't explained how you came to be in that shop."

"No," she replied, gazing straight ahead. "And moreover I won't."

"Well, I know," he went on. "You were buying things — men's things. Lounsbury gave that away too."

"A nice little gossip you had!" she flung at him scornfully. "Did you pump him with your usual tact?"

"It wasn't necessary," said Tom with a mirthless laugh. "He let it all out by asking if the scarf I have on was one of those he saw you buy the day before Christmas. What's the answer to that?"

"There isn't any."

"You didn't give me anything to wear. You didn't give father anything to wear."

"Your memory is improving."

"Perhaps you were sending that vaudeville genius a few clothes?"

"Perhaps," she said recklessly.

"Does that mean yes or no?"

"Neither. I'm done with explanations."

This flat defiance surprised her as much as the chance bolt from him which provoked it. It was as if some bystander had abruptly taken her part. Her mind sat aloof and marveled at the audacity of its servants, her lips. What now? Was this the supreme test she had precipitated? The last battle? Disaster? She tensely awaited his attack. But none came. The inquisition ended then and there, the air cleared, and before they had covered another block Tom calmly remarked on some trivial incident in the street, and she in the same tone made reply. They were more truly married than they knew.

She dared not hope, however, that this was more than a fitful reaction. Sooner or later the black vapors which had made their reunion such a purgatory would rise and cloud his brain. He could not forego his acids and test-tubes. He must always be analyzing the precise nature and temperature of her love. Always! At the thought she wondered and ventured into researches of her own.

But, curiously, it was his father who held her in check, for, as her relations with Tom grew strained, the bond between her and Roger Ballantine knit and strengthened. He showed that he liked to have her by him, watched for her to share his early breakfasts, sought her out in quiet corners, seemed genuinely interested in the workings of her mind. He often treated her more like a man than a girl and would put all sorts of hypothetical questions to draw her out. If his wife were beyond earshot, he would even broach business and, promoting Sheila to the management of a B & H branch, confront her with problems of trade or labor. Once — the talk was typical — he pitched upon the theme of great possessions.

"Suppose you came into a million dollars," he said. "Unconditionally — no strings attached. What would you do first?"

She knew very well what she would do, but it was not a programme she could divulge in detail.

"I think I'd want to help every one who needed help," she returned slowly.

"Every one? That would mean stripping yourself — something the rich don't do. It's only the poor who can afford such a luxury. No; you'd soon clap a safety valve on that impulse."

"Did you?"

"Yes," he said frankly. "Long ago. First you realize you're rich and then that you're not so rich as another fellow."

"It must be wonderful — the first sensation, I mean. With me — I can't tell, of course — but I think I'd feel as if I had been given wings."

"Wings, eh!" He chuckled. "It didn't strike

me that way. One day at lunch I woke up to the fact that I didn't need to look at the prices on the menu. That was my one and last thrill."

Sheila's face shadowed.

"What a pity!"

"Oh, I don't know," he said dryly. "It seems to me that one thrill after another would undermine the constitution." He mused a moment. "So helping some one was your first idea?"

"Yes."

"Or was it every one? Well, no matter. But maybe I'd better limit you to the income on that million till you're older. Being a woman, you'd go on a shopping debauch, I daresay?"

"I'd buy a few clothes."

"Jewels?"

"Not many."

"You'd travel?"

"Yes."

"Marry?"

"I can see only one answer to that," she smiled.

"Build a house?"

"I'd want a home."

"Like this?"

"I — I —"

"The noes have it! How about society?"

"I'd wish to have friends."

"Wealthy?"

"Real friends."

"H-mn! The higher you climb, the less you can tell about the springs of their regard. Still, money brings 'em. Let's pass to the children. I assume — with Miss Perrin — that they may fall to your

lot. Would you raise them as you were raised or give them an easier row to hoe? Would you rather have their affection or their respect? Where would you send them to school? What would you want them taught? What kind of men or women would you want them to marry? Would you leave them all your money and all your problems? You don't know, of course. You can't even grasp such questions till they're put up to you in terms of flesh and blood. And then you don't know. Your instincts addle your brains."

"Yet nobody really means it when they say that the rich can't be happy," she commented.

"No, it's humbug. The people who harp on it most would be the first to grab at a chance to try it out. Nearly everybody would rather be rich — especially the rich. I would myself."

"Problems and all?"

"Yes. It's human nature."

"Then don't you think the second generation will be apt to feel the same way?" she asked.

Roger looked her in the eyes.

"The second generation won't worry me much if you keep your head," he replied.

It was a rather cryptic saying, but it put heart in her, and she came to the night of nights no older than her years. Things would end right somehow. They must. Meanwhile, here was the storied "small ballroom", the "tapestry suite", — a peep into wonderland which Daddy Joe would surely wish her to enjoy. He would relish the dramatic aspect of her appearance on such a stage. To dance at Sherry's — she who had jigged on the asphalt to hurdy-

gurdies! She would have given much to be able to share the joke of it with Tom. But he, poor martyr, was not in a joking humor. Nor was Ethel. Dead in earnest, her week-long mystery revealed as gold in color and bold in cut, she strained her eyes toward the receiving line, another milestone in her social Marathon.

Such music! It called to Sheila as music never had. It pulsed in her veins and shone in her eyes as they waited their turn, and the sight of her — eager, glowing, beautiful — revived Mrs. Lounsbury's hard-worked and somewhat wilted smile.

"How you do enjoy life, my dear," she said. "You're more radiant even than you were at the Bowl."

Molly bent close with a greeting for her private ear.

"Scrumptious! Why don't you always wear blue and silver? You'll have all of the men eating out of your hand!"

Then Stoughton Lounsbury started from ambush, and the next moment she was in rhythmic motion amidst the anointed.

"I haven't forgotten what you said about partners," he told her, halfway round the room. "How am I classed?"

"You must know that you are a good dancer."

"Which means that I was already out of mind?"

"Oh, no."

"You make exceptions?"

"This is a very special occasion. I shall be everything that's polite."

"It's a very special occasion for me," he said. "I

hope this is the first of thousands of dances we'll have together."

"To-night!"

"Night after night. In all sorts of places."

"That sounds as if you were going in for it professionally. I thought you were more serious minded."

"You'll find me serious when you're ready to be serious yourself," he warned.

She invited him to admire a neighboring gown.

"Striking," he said, "but I'd rather notice the picture before the frame. I never stop to think what you have on. If you were in rags, you'd still be what you are."

"But hardly where I am," she laughed. "Unless, of course, I came like Cinderella."

"I wish you had," he declared. "When you took to your heels at midnight, I'd capture the lost slipper."

She felt like another Cinderella in sober truth as the evening ran its course. None of these girls could divine or share her sensations. Débutantes or buds-to-be, they seemed equally composed. Sherry's or the Ritz, two orchestras or one, roses or orchids, it was an old story. They were as familiar with such scenes as they were with one another's first names, and all, regardless of sex, were on a first-name basis. They might have belonged to one opulent and blasé family. Several dinners had preceded the dance, and much of the patter she overheard was an aftermath of these and other holiday merrymakings which had eased the strain of the higher education. Conversation with her various partners was absurdly easy. Any catch phrase would serve.

At intervals she glimpsed Ethel — swimming freely

in her natural element — and Tom, martyred no longer, but a gallant and smiling figure of success. For this was the night's astounding upshot. Tom the scorner was cheek by jowl with the scorned. He had clearly and triumphantly arrived. Once he waltzed with her, but as if in duty bound. His glance roved over her head, and his thoughts apparently followed his glance. Other dancers bespoke him in passing, and he answered jests and allusions empty of meaning for her. He was as knowing as if he had graced the entire round of preliminary dinners. He was already "old man" to sundry youths, and a forward minx in vivid green unblushingly hailed him as "Tommy" and charged him not to forget a vague but seemingly important promise.

"Tommy!" repeated Sheila. "And what, pray, do you call her?"

"Hazel," he said blandly. "Or perhaps it's Maud. I'm not sure."

"You're quite at home."

"Why not? Do as the Romans do is a good old motto."

They finished the dance in silence.

"Engaged for the next?" he asked with solicitude.

"Yes," she said. "To Mr. Lounsbury. I'm sorry."

"Oh, that's all right," he replied. "I'm engaged myself. Let me take you over to him. My partner is on that side of the room."

"Hazel-Maud?" She evoked a bright and care-free smile.

"No," he said. "Barbara."

She saw that he was attempting to pay her back

in her own coin, and her sense of humor granted that he had scored. But quite as plainly, though without amusement, she perceived that this very success, this ironical triumph, to which she had in a manner hailed him, might cause him to reflect that he had held himself too cheap. He already knew that Ethel and her fortune would have been his for the taking. From to-night his fancy might entertain the idea that a wife with a fixed place in the social register would have been as easy to acquire. On the face of it, there was no reason why Roger Ballantine's only son should not have looked high.

Young Mr. Lounsbury was at once beguiled and troubled by the pensive sweetness of her expression.

"If it's 'Tipperary' that gives you that sad look," he said, "I'll see that they don't play it again. After all — if you consider its associations — it isn't a piece to dance by."

She assured him that "Tipperary" had not cast a blight over her spirits.

"Perhaps it's a hungry look," she suggested. "I was too excited over coming to eat my dinner."

He brightened at the confession.

"They'll serve supper after this number," he said. "I'm to be at your table, by the way."

"How nice!"

"I saw to that."

"Oh!" said she.

"You're not annoyed?"

"Annoyed?"

"I keep forgetting that we're not old friends. I wish I could make you forget it too. Friendships have to grow, of course, but they can be fostered.

It would help — Easter is such a long way off — it would help tremendously if you'd let me write to you."

"I can't do that," she said quickly.

"Did I blurt it out like a freshman?" he queried disgustedly. "How should I have gone about it?"

"Please!"

He smiled down on her.

"I want to please," he said. "More than I ever wanted anything in my life."

She glanced aside to find Tom at elbow. Barbara — if it was Barbara — was wasting her blandishments. She did not exist. His eyes were Sheila's and hers alone. They blazed with a lurid reminder of his passion, his jealousy, his legal claim.

Lounsbury missed step, apologized, and missed step again. Then his hold on her tightened.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

TOM went his way immediately after New Year's, and the next day but one Sheila reached Miss Perrin's. They had not quarreled again. Indeed they had been studiously agreeable to the very end. But both were conscious of things unsaid, and she, for one, had put New York behind her with relief. By turns she felt like a fugitive from justice and a hare that had outrun the hounds. It was very puzzling. When she was quite rested she meant to have a thorough accounting with Sheila Moore.

Her languor was not peculiar to herself. Nearly all the daughters of the rich in Miss Perrin's care were prey to a post-holiday sloth. Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and lesser social centers had had their gayeties as well as New York, and Cupid had potted many victims among the undergraduates of our leading universities. A girl from Germantown had received three proposals of marriage, so she said. The atmosphere was narcotic with sentiment. The incoming mail was heavy for almost two quarters of the inconstant moon.

But the ailment which plagued Sheila could not be thrown off in a fortnight, and one evening Sophie Perrin did the unprecedented and dropped into her

room. She entered as if the whim had seized her in passing the open door, and, sitting down, put a few casual questions about vacation amusements and the Ballantine household.

"I have heard from Mr. Ballantine, by the way," she said. "He is very much pleased with you. Coming from him, this ought to mean a great deal to you."

"It does," said Sheila.

"I thought you ought to know it. You haven't seemed yourself since your return."

The girl looked up and then down.

"Myself?" she said slowly. "The trouble is, Miss Perrin, there are two of me — two selves. I suppose that sounds silly to you?"

"No. Nor does it sound new. It's as old as philosophy, as old as civilization. So you see you're quite normal."

"That's something," said Sheila, responding to the smile in her eyes.

"That's everything," amended Sophie. "It's your situation, not yourself, that's abnormal. But you have faced it so far with good sense, and I see no reason why it should seem more difficult now than it has all along. I don't wish to force your confidence, but if you'd care to talk it over with me — ever —"

"Thank you," said Sheila, coloring. "There is nobody I'd rather go to, Miss Perrin. You're so sane, and calm, and just — and human."

Sophie laughed.

"I'm glad you added 'human'," she returned.

As Sheila betrayed no inclination to put her manifold virtues to the test, she chatted briefly of imper-

sonal things and rose to go. Then her glance rested on the marriage chest between the windows and she paused before it.

“Are the girls never curious about this?” she inquired. “It’s so obviously what it is.”

“They’ve asked questions.”

“And surmised?”

“They’ve taken it for a hope chest, of course, but I tell them all that not a stitch of my own has gone into it.” She hesitated and then, moved by an impulse to prove her gratitude and trust, she caught up a key that lay among her textbooks. “I’ve never shown these things, but I’d like to — now — if you’ll let me?”

The lifted lid released a hint of lavender, and Sophie Perrin, forgetting the schoolmistress, knelt beside her on the rug. Samplers of the era of packet boats and stagecoaches, their bright worsteds toned by time; laces, some as old and as yellowed as the samplers, others as fresh as if just laid by; linen hemstitched with the fond pains of more leisured days; embroideries intricate in pattern, exquisite in finish, amazing in quantity, piece after piece, a treasure trove of needlework, flowed from the box of blackened oak in mute witness to the tastes and traditions of the woman who had flung her cap over the mill to go vagabonding with Joe Moore.

Miss Perrin sat back amidst the fragrant spoils.

“You don’t need telling that these things are as lovely as they are unusual,” she said. “No one who ever held a needle would have a second’s doubt. But I wonder if you appreciate their value?”

“I know that my mother set great store by them.

That's why I brought them here. I couldn't bear to lock them up in some warehouse."

"Assuredly not. They're like family portraits. But I referred to their money value. You ought to take the best of care of them. They would bring high prices at a sale."

"These!" She swept up the fabrics heaping her lap in a single enfolding gesture. "I'd as soon think of selling myself."

Sophie eyed her a moment and then sprang to her feet with the ease of a girl.

"The chance of their reaching the market seems remote," she said. "Thank you, my dear. I feel that I know you better. As for those troublesome two selves, come to me if they ever seem on the brink of civil war. I may be able to arbitrate."

Sheila often thought of this offer. Every time a letter came from Tom there was conflict between the self who blindly loved and the self who perhaps as blindly judged. These letters were meant to be void of offense. With all his resources of pen and ink and English as it is taught at Harvard, Tom strove to gloss the trials of their joint holiday. He invited her to behold a husband purged of every ill humor, a state of wedlock riven by no discords, a perpetual honeymoon. But the more he dwelt on the cloudless future, the more she recalled the tempestuous past. Bidden to think upon the month of brides and roses, she lived over the closing days of December and wondered if they were a foretaste of matrimony.

Stoughton Lounsbury was ignored. For all Tom's guarded pages told, there might have been no such person in the world. But Molly not only kept her

brother's memory green, but furnished proofs that he was still alive and as keenly interested in the future as his classmate. To what degree she was in his confidence Sheila was at first uncertain. The way of a man with a maid who was also his sister was to her a sealed book. She noticed, however, that Molly no longer chattered in the playful strain of New Haven. She took it quietly for granted that Stoughton had become party to their friendship, and that all three were destined to see one another constantly in the time to come. Sheila must visit them in Newport if they opened their cottage. She must visit them wherever they were. If peace were declared, they might run abroad for a more extended trip than usual. It would be heavenly if she could come along. Surely the Ballantines would not mind?

It was easy to meet such daydreams with generalities. Summer was still afar off. But presently Molly startled her with a clear-cut plan for the spring recess.

"We're going to Bermuda — all of us," she announced. "And so are you."

"Bermuda!"

"The day after school closes. The crossing will make you seasick, and the island will be windy, and you'll probably never care to look another Easter lily in the face; but we want you, and you're coming or I'll know the reason why."

Sheila tried to smile.

"I'd go through more than that to be with you," she said. "But Bermuda is out of the question. Thank you a thousand times. I've never had a friend like you. I'll never have another."

Molly heeded only her refusal.

"You won't come!" she exclaimed in sharp disappointment.

"I can't."

"That's not a reason."

"Don't be cross with me. If I spend Easter away from the school, it must be with the Ballantines."

"Must! Haven't you any freedom? Do they lay down the law to you in every detail? It strikes me that Mr. Ballantine takes a very narrow view of his guardianship. And yet people say he's so generous and just. You say it yourself."

"And so he is. I owe him everything."

"Everything? You can't mean that literally?"

It was certainly not what she had meant her to imply, but she was not sorry that the word had escaped her. Let her have that much of the truth at any rate. And let her repeat it to whom it might concern!

"Yes — literally," she said. "My schooling, my clothes, my pocket money all come from Mr. Ballantine. I have nothing of my own."

To her astonishment Molly laughed.

"Nothing of your own?" she echoed. "Gee whiz! Go look in your mirror!"

"You don't understand —"

"Yes, I do. It clears up no end of things that have puzzled Stoughton and me. Neither of us could quite make out Tom Ballantine's attitude. But it's plain enough now. He wanted to save both of you from a fall. It was rather fine of him yet not exactly flattering. My brother isn't a fortune hunter."

Sheila shrank in dismay from this fresh twist of the tightening coil.

"There's so much I can't explain," she sighed.

"I ought to have been frank when I first saw that you liked me. But I loved you for yourself and I — oh, I so wanted — for a little while at least — to have such a friend as you."

With a boylike gesture Molly dropped a hand on her shoulder.

"Have I ever given you cause to think me a snob?" she asked.

"Never."

"Well, then — shut up! I feel as mushy as if I'd been to see Warfield in *The Music Master*. Let's have a brisk game of squash."

Sheila drifted. There seemed nothing else to do. Strive as she might, events always ordered themselves as they would. But this phase was transient. Spring reminded her that she was alive and to live was to dream. She even persuaded herself that, with the Lounsburys all and sundry in Bermuda, she could pass an unruffled Eastertide with Tom.

But the high powers who amused themselves with her destiny did not subject her to this test. Possibly their vice-regent, Roger Ballantine, deemed the Christmas experiment too ticklish to repeat. At any rate, his wife wrote that he had decided to combine a western business trip with a visit to the Panama Exposition, and that she and Ethel would accompany him. If Miss Perrin renewed her former invitation for a run South, Sheila might of course accept. Otherwise she would surely not mind a few days of quiet idleness at the school. The country must be quite too wonderful now. Tom, as no doubt she already knew, meant to stay on in Cambridge and burn the midnight oil.

Sophie did not renew her former invitation. She proposed to level a mountain of work that had piled itself on her desk. But she was unfeignedly glad to have Sheila remain, and she made a point of their spending at least the evenings together. She was as little the schoolmistress as she had been the night they sat beside the hope chest and the girl looked forward to these hours as the best of the day. She could always think quicker and straighter when with Sophie. A fresh breeze seemed to play through all their talks, and the wholesome tang of it outlasted the moment and braced her when she was alone.

Rules were suspended. Free to come and go as she would, she explored unfamiliar bits of the countryside and several times trolleyed to neighboring river towns. She was not enamored of the river towns. They scrambled uphill and down in one monotonous pattern and, still steeped in winter lethargy, were deplorably untidy and out at heels. A special aim prompted these excursions, and her quest ended at a railway newsstand. The youth in charge smiled warmly as she made her purchase and asked whether she belonged in the movies or a regular troupe, so she took her gaudy periodical into the open and, hurdling the pictures and gossip of stars, located "Vaudeville Dates" and then, far down the alphabet, "Pam, Lew: Poli's, Scranton."

The fine print swam under her eyes. Daddy Joe's engagement with a motion picture studio was still to seek. He was plodding the old dreary round of the four-a-day. Yet, on second thought, she was relieved that this was so. Pennsylvania was better than California. Did she need him, a continent

would not stretch between. She ripped out the meager notice with her hatpin and laid it carefully in her purse. It was a message of a sort. She could not lightly let it go.

The spring was young, a mere promise, but the softness of one of its latter days was in the afternoon air as she returned to the school and, loath to go indoors, she skirted the building and wandered into a rear garden where she knew the crocuses were bursting through the crumbling loam. But the crocuses were not to detain her. She had scarcely bent to the first yellow cup when a maidservant, her silver tray glittering in the sun, came down the path and handed her Stoughton Lounsbury's card.

Sheila eyed it fixedly and then, remembering the human being behind the cap and apron, found her voice.

"Does Mr. Lounsbury know I am here?"

"I think so — that is, I'm sure of it, Miss Moore. He's been watching from one of the drawing room windows for a long time."

"Alone? Didn't Miss Perrin receive him?"

"Miss Perrin went out after luncheon." She ventured a discreet smile. "He said that he'd wait till you came."

He would indeed! Nothing was more certain. Sheila walked slowly toward the house, lingered a moment at the door and entered. A feminine impulse halted her again by a hall mirror, but she stifled it and passed on. It did not beseem her to prink for such a visitor.

He was on his feet, facing the door — expectant, ardent, a man in love.

"You forbade me to write — not to come," he said. "So here I am."

She gave him her hand and, loosening her coat, murmured something about her surprise. It would have been gross hypocrisy to say that she was glad to see him. She would rather have seen a ghost.

"I thought you went to Bermuda with the others," she added.

"I did."

She took a seat flanked by a reading table and the hearth and repented her choice. He straightway drew up a footstool and blockaded the corner.

"At your feet," he said.

"You'd find a chair more comfortable," she returned. "I'm sorry Miss Perrin is out, but I think she'll be home soon."

"Now's my chance then," he declared. "I caught the first boat from Bermuda and the first train out of New York to see you — to see you alone — and I shan't let Miss Perrin or any other chaperon stop me from saying what I've come to say. You know I love you, Sheila. You've known it all along and done everything you could to keep me from telling you outright."

"And you mustn't now," she said and would have risen had he not seized her hands. "You don't understand —"

"I didn't till the other day," he whipped in. "I've been half crazy trying to understand. I even thought you disliked me — tolerated me for Molly's sake. But that's over and done with. Molly set it straight while we were crossing. You're the truest, finest —"

"Don't!"

"Loveliest creature who ever walked the earth," he rushed on. "But, Sheila — how could you misjudge me so? How could you think it would matter to me what you have or haven't? Money! I've more of it than I know what to do with, but it will mean nothing to me if you don't share it. But you will. You do care. You —"

She got to her feet, but no farther. His arms held her captive. His lips silenced hers before they could frame a syllable of denial. She felt the blood scorch her face and as suddenly recede and leave her cold. Then he raised his head — like a victor — and she thrust him off, and he saw the shamed misery of her eyes.

"Darling!" he cried. "Have I hurt you? God knows I —" He brought up short, and the color fled from his own face. "Don't say that it isn't true, that our kiss —"

"Your kiss," she flashed.

"You returned it."

"No!"

"I could swear —"

"No, I say!" She was passionately emphatic, but even as she insisted she wondered.


"You came to me, dear."

"I stumbled."

"Stumbled?" he repeated dully. "It was an accident? You didn't mean to come? I've only imagined —"

"You wouldn't listen. You wouldn't let me go." Her voice wavered. "You — you just *took* me."

He was back at her side in an instant.



“If I had waited —”

She shook her head.

“It wouldn’t have made any difference. Can’t we — can’t we forget this and be friends?”

“Friends!” He clasped one of her hands between his palms and, holding it against his breast, fathomed her eyes. “After that kiss, Sheila? No! We belong to each other. I’m going to have you. I’ll never give you up.”

“You must —”

“Never,” he said again. “If you don’t love me now — as I love you — the day is coming when you will.”

A door opened and shut, an alert step crossed the hall. Sophie Perrin entered. But Lounsbury was ready now for chaperonage. If he had not heard all he hoped to hear, he had at least said what he had come to say. And his was the last word.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

SOPHIE was silent under the evening lamp. A magazine lay in her lap unread. Sheila, across the hearth rug, took counsel of the fire and sought to analyze the elusive elements of a kiss. It was the one point in her conduct as regards Stoughton Lounsbury of which she was doubtful. He could have sworn! She could not. Her memory would neither accuse nor acquit her of a guilty complicity. It simply refused to clear.

She glanced over at her companion, so tranquil, so sane — and so considerate; there had been no questions.

“He came to tell me that he loved me,” she said abruptly. “From Bermuda.”

“So I inferred.” Sophie put her magazine aside. “Did he succeed?”

“Yes. I couldn’t prevent him. Perhaps I ought not to have seen him. But he’d been waiting and would have gone on waiting. He’s that kind. Besides, he knew that I had come back. So I decided to face it.”

“Quite right. And now that it’s behind you, face ahead.”

“I’m trying to, Miss Perrin. But I — oh, I do wish you had returned sooner. It wasn’t just a

matter of saying no. And it isn't behind me yet. I bungled things frightfully."

"Do you mean that he went away hoping?"

"Yes — exactly that. I couldn't tell him that I'm already married."

Sophie sat erect.

"While you are a pupil in this school! I should hope not. But no is no, if it's forcibly said. Why should there have been any doubt as to the meaning of your words?"

"He kissed me."

"Kissed you!"

"Right where you are now. I was a fool to take that chair. I couldn't get away when I found that he wouldn't listen to me. I stumbled into his arms and then — then it happened. Of course I explained — when I could."

"But he believed the kiss?"

"Yes."

Sophie's austerity melted.

"I'm not surprised," she said dryly. "You have a very lovely mouth."

"But he thought — imagined — that I —"

"Coöperated?"

"Yes."

"That's not surprising either. But he'll realize his mistake in time and get over it in time. Some other nice girl's kiss will strike him as equally eloquent. Meanwhile, I'd not begrudge him the memory, my dear. It may help keep him out of mischief."

Sheila smiled faintly. This prosaic philosophy could not be bolted in a lump. She did not begrudge Stoughton his golden memory. She was will-

ing to have it abide with him as a talisman. But her charity fell short of the hypothetical nice girl who was to complete the cure.

"I know that's the sensible view to take," she said. "But things are in such a tangle. He has talked with Molly, and she's my friend. And he, in a way, is a friend of Tom's."

"June will cut the knot."

Would it? Sheila's thoughts raced to Scranton, Pennsylvania.

"I'm sick of deception — of playing a part," she sighed.

"I daresay," said Sophie. "But there is no reason for you to feel like a criminal. On the contrary, you ought to count yourself the luckiest girl who ever made a runaway match. You have married, not some worthless young rake, but a decent wholesome lad with the makings of a decent wholesome husband. And, moreover, you have won the good opinion of his family. Those are the big facts."

Certain minor facts continued to seem important.

"Ought I to tell Tom about to-day?"

"That is a man-and-wife affair and beyond my province. No mere spinster could decide."

"But I wish you'd give me your opinion," said Sheila.

Sophie locked her slender fingers back of her head and gazed ceilingward in maiden meditation.

"If I ever marry," she remarked, "I trust I shan't look upon my husband either as a father confessor or a census taker. But that is a purely personal view. Some women like to turn their minds inside out. They enjoy telling things — even their age.

They are conversational vampires. They would rather talk than think."

"You are laughing at me!"

"No — with you," said Sophie, rising. "Suppose we go to bed."

By daylight Sheila found Miss Perrin's advice no less practical. The Lounsbury's were indubitably a side issue. Stoughton's air castles were of his own building, and he would have to dig himself from their ruins as best he might. If Molly's friendship must die a violent death in June, so be it. The big facts were the big facts, and it behooved her to bear them ever in mind.

Molly in no way embarrassed her. She gossiped freely of Bermuda, which had apparently swarmed with her friends, and dropped that her brother's stay had been brief. But, while she gave no hint that she knew the reason, Sheila was sure that he had mentioned his call at the school. Yet she was quite as positive that he had been chary of details. He would as soon confide the whole episode to his sister as — well, as she would to Tom. Sophie's purely personal musings had chimed with her own bent. His studies were best left undisturbed.

The wild possibility that Stoughton himself might disturb them never crossed her thoughts till she received a heated scrawl from Tom.

"Can't I trust you round the corner?" Such was his ominous beginning. "Can't you get it through your head that your first loyalty is to me, your husband? Why didn't you tell me that Lounsbury had been to see you? Why did you let him spring it on me and make me look like a fool? I want you to

write me at once exactly what took place — everything he said, everything you said. You don't seem to realize that you are married. He wouldn't have had the nerve to go up to see you if you had not encouraged him in some way, and it stands to reason that you must have soft-soaped him while he was there. If you had turned him down hard for coming, he wouldn't have opened his lips to me about his call. He'd have felt cheap and shut up. No; you jollied him along. What for? My sake, perhaps! Whatever you do, don't fob me off with that excuse. There's a limit to even my gullibility."

It was the most moving piece of writing Tom Balantine ever penned. Only by some elemental act could Sheila have expressed the full measure of her rage. She burned to lay hands on the author, to box his ears — yes; knock his head against young Lounsbury's. She was furious with the pair of them. If this was what it meant to be loved, give her celibacy to the last trump!

Her cooler judgment absolved Stoughton. He would not wittingly entangle her in such a web. He was the sport of fortune, a fellow victim with herself, and deserved her pity. But Tom! No inner advocate offered a brief on his behalf. His case was indefensible, his sole hope lay in the mercy of the court. And this was what the culprit had the grace to perceive. A week of silent disdain on her part brought him to his senses, and he recanted as fluently as he had denounced.

But apology is an instrument of a single string, and this letter had no such power to stir as its forerunner. Sheila already knew its phrases by heart. They had

followed all their quarrels. And so it was with her reply. These phrases too were hackneyed. They had been said over and over. They would assuredly do weary service again. Could she ever hope for unbroken peace? Would his jealousy cease with actual marriage? Not unless he stopped loving her. With what he called love! Such devotion as her father's was the only passion worthy of that name. And to Tom he was a mountebank!

From white nights spent with thoughts like these she would rebound to a feverish optimism which swept every doubt aside. The real Tom was the trusting, worshipping boy she had known before any one could meddle with their happiness. Their woes were not of their own making. They had come, not from within, but without. No wonder he had grown irritable and suspicious. He had seen every face turn against him, been wounded in heart and pride. How could he come through such trials with sweet temper and steady nerves? It was asking the impossible. As soon as his probation was over he would find himself. She would find herself. It was as simple as the first sum in addition. It *was* the first sum in addition. Only with them — marvelous paradox — one and one would make one.

Through a fleeting April and a mad-footed May she swung between these extremes to end at dead center, certain of nothing but her indecision. Sophie threw her speculative glances and once or twice gave her a chance to unburden her mind, but Sheila kept her own counsel. She could guess what Miss Perrin would say. Knowing nothing of Daddy Joe, she would suspect her of mooning over Stoughton Louns-

bury and again remind her of the big facts. As if she needed reminding! She could no more forget them than she could ignore the warning of the calendar that here at last was June.

The remaining days beside the Hudson slipped from her like quicksilver and then were no more. She was parting with girls she expected never to see again; with Molly and Gertrude, in spirit already at Class Day spreads; with Sophie, who had been her bulwark against a sea of troubles which she now must breast alone. She was motoring away in the rear seat of the Ballantine car just as she had first come months ago. And, as before, she sat between the elder Ballantines, and Roger talked to her in undertones while his wife dozed.

"I had Tom on the 'phone yesterday," he told her. "He says he went through his finals like greased lightning and can't wait for us to come on."

"There isn't any doubt about his graduating?"

"None whatever. That sheepskin is as good as framed."

"How glad you must feel," she said.

"Yes," he assented. "It will be in Latin — which is a dead language for me in every sense — but there'll be good reading between the lines."

Sheila thought this over.

"They couldn't take his degree away from him?" she asked.

"Take it away?"

"Afterward — when they know."

Roger turned.

"They know," he said. "They've known since last fall."

"You told them!"

"Of course. Do you suppose I'd do business any other way? I went to the dean and laid my cards on the table. I didn't see fit to mention it to Tom. I wanted him to have every incentive to toe the mark. He was bound to misjudge me in any case, and another count in the indictment didn't matter. I'd have told you, however, if you had brought it up."

She stared down the river road. How could she go on with the great deception? He made every form of insincerity seem odious. Then his voice recalled her.

"The Perrin system must be a bit too strenuous for warm weather," he said. "You're thinner in the cheeks and below par in color. How would you like a salt-water cruise?"

"To Boston?" She forced herself to look at him.

"No. We're going over by train. Has Tom ever spoken of our yacht?"

"No," she said.

"Well, we have one. A good share of the time it's only part of the view we get from our summer place on the Connecticut shore. The novelty of it wore off with the first coat of paint. I could have got my money out more than once lately. Anything that floats is in demand these days. But I'm glad I didn't sell. I'm glad the *Pastime* is right where it lies in Boston harbor — ready for your honeymoon."

His face became indistinct.

"I —" she began, but her voice forsook her.

"Let it go at that," he cut in hastily. "You two have lived up to your agreement, and I propose to

hold up my end and do a little more. You've earned a wedding trip, and I want it to be one that you'll be glad to remember. Take your time — all the time you want. Just loaf along the New England coast till you feel like making the home port."

She caught blindly at his hand and before he could stop her raised it to her lips.

"It would take the rest of my life to thank you for all you've been to me," she said. "I — I haven't deserved it. I never can."

He recovered his hand and eyed it as if it had fallen amongst raffish adventures and come back stupefyingly changed.

"Where were we?" he queried, and then, with his dry smile: "All at sea, I reckon. Well, to get back to land, you'll need some new duds — summer things, I daresay — but you can go over that with mother when she's thoroughly awake."

Mrs. Ballantine roused shortly, bestowed a patronizing glance on the Palisades and dropped a remark so inconsequent that it had the air of a postscript to her dreams.

"Ethel," she said, "is still in California. A friend who lives in Santa Barbara begged her to make her a long visit. It seems almost providential — coming just at this time."

Sheila felt no interest in Ethel's state of mind, but she rejoiced that, while her own thoughts were so chaotic, she need not undergo the scrutiny of her black eyes. Ethel's astral self, however, appeared to haunt Mrs. Ballantine. She mentioned her a second time during the ride and missed her audibly at intervals that evening. Every turn of the huge

house — forlorn in summer linens, its servants decimated for the opening of the country place — served to remind her of the absent girl. And Ethel again, a paragon of good taste, moved beside them on the morrow in the shops. Indeed, it was only when they boarded the Boston train on the day succeeding that they left her definitely behind.

But a mother-in-law trifling with vain regrets was rather to be chosen than one grappling with reality. Roger elected to spend most of that Sunday journey in the lesser boredom of the club smoker, with the result that Sheila was spared none of the catalogue of Tom's virtues nor left unimpressed by the dizzy heights to which a mysterious Providence had raised her, his wife and consort. She suspected Mrs. Balantine of trying to even the score as regards the Lounsburys. The once prized honor of their notice was now treated as a matter of course. Her humble agency in securing it was tossed into the limbo of benefits forgot.

She grew very weary as she gave ear and, with her weariness, a trifle giddy. Bizarre thoughts and impulses tempted her. She pictured the effect on her companion's smug self-esteem of a piercing scream. Or of a sardonic laugh? Or, more dignified, she might say to her in a firm quelling tone: "Woman, you are a conversational vampire!" She also wondered what it felt like to have hysterics. On the whole it must be rather gorgeously satisfying to let loose. But she denied herself this luxury, arrived at Back Bay Station in good order, kissed Tom with a fresh appreciation of the fact that his was a handsome face to kiss, noted the perfection of his spring

tailoring, listened with wifely deference to his views on the prospects of the crew, and, still mistress of her nerves, reached the hotel and the privacy of her room.

But it was a qualified privacy. One of a suite, her room opened into a sitting room, which in turn led to the bedroom of the Ballantines. There was a lock on the connecting door, however, and, when she had shut herself in, she turned the key and gave a hallboy money to buy the theatrical papers which till now she had had no chance to acquire. He was an unconscionable time over the errand, but she did not so much as strip off a glove during the wait.

They were in her hands at last, and topmost was the periodical she had sought and bought at Easter. And now as then she had eyes only for "Vaudeville Dates" and the lines of fine print which should reveal the whereabouts of Lew Pam. There it was. For the current week he was in Providence, Rhode Island. An hour away! Providence — Mrs. Ballantine's word! It had the look of an omen. Sheila let the magazine fall, studied the rug a moment, and then the panels of the connecting door.

The three of them were together in the sitting room when she entered. Tom, hands in pockets, held the center of the floor, expounding she knew not what. His mother gazed at him in idolatrous silence from the lounge. Roger, his cigar tilted at an acute angle, was at a window contemplating the glories of Copley Square. Her coming checked the flow of Tom's speech and stimulated Mrs. Ballantine's.

"Why, you're just as you stepped off the train," she said querulously. "You haven't done anything. And Tom was planning —"

"I've done something," said the girl. "I've made up my mind."

Roger Ballantine wheeled at her first tense word, and Sheila, skirting Tom as if he were a table or a chair, walked straight to the older man and stood before him.

"I owe you a great debt," she said slowly, "and I'm going to pay in the only way I can. I give you back your son."

CHAPTER NINETEEN

TOM was the first to act. He seemed to defy the law of gravitation. He fairly catapulted himself across the room.

"You'll give *me* back!" he cried, whirling her about. "As if I were a dog you didn't fancy! Not much! I'm your husband, and I know my rights."

"Go easy," interposed his father. "Stop trying to pull Sheila's arm out of joint. This isn't moving pictures. Listen to what she has to say."

"I don't want to listen to such rot. The time for talk has gone by. She's got to come to her senses and realize that I'm a human being. I'll put my foot down right here — "

"Not on mine," said Roger, side-stepping nimbly. "I'm a human being too."

"As my wife — "

"Your wife must have reasons that look grave enough to her to warrant such a statement as she has made. Out with them, my child."

Sheila saw herself trapped at the very outset. She had already named the only reason she could avow.

"I can't put it any stronger than I have," she said. "It's something which I feel is right for me to do. I hope it can be arranged without much trouble — "

I've caused you so much as it is, Mr. Ballantine. But perhaps — you ought to know — perhaps it will be simple. Tom and I haven't lived together. Only a few people know that we went through a ceremony. Boy and girl marriages are often annulled, aren't they?"

Tom, hovering white-faced beside her, pounced on this hapless query.

"Do you call our marriage a boy and girl affair?" he demanded. "Do you mean to say that I wasn't old enough to know my own mind?"

"No."

"Or that you weren't?"

"No, Tom; but —"

"Then cut out the cradle-snatching stuff. Admit that you're sick of your bargain and don't care a damn for me — that you're aiming at higher game."

She turned to him, head up, her gaze unflinching.

"It wouldn't be true," she said.

"None of those things?"

"Not one."

"You know you haven't been the same to me since you met Lounsbury."

"Have you been the same to me? Your jealousy has distorted everything I've said or done. It's you who have kept Stoughton Lounsbury in my thoughts. You wouldn't let me forget him. But he is nothing to me — nothing."

"Then suppose we leave him out of this," struck in Roger.

"By all means," seconded Mrs. Ballantine, no longer content to be a mere listener. "What are the Lounsbury's to us?"

It was an ill-starred entrance. Tom wheeled and smote the shining mark.

"You sang a different tune last winter," he flared. "If you and Ethel hadn't been so keen to mix with them, this ghastly business would never have happened."

"How dare you —"

Roger left them truculently eye to eye and addressed himself to Sheila.

"Has Tom's jealousy anything vital to do with this decision of yours?" he asked.

"No, Mr. Ballantine."

"Then we'll eliminate that also. What is it that has changed your feelings toward him?"

"Nothing. I haven't changed toward Tom. I still care for him."

"But not enough to be his wife?"

"Too much," she said. "I hope he'll make a brilliant marriage — one Mrs. Ballantine would approve of — and be very happy."

"My God!" groaned Tom. "She's crazy."

His mother's still raw sensibilities were lashed afresh.

"You are reflecting on me," she rebuked. "My first thought would be for your happiness. I have done my best to look on the bright side of even this marriage."

Roger continued his probe.

"How about your own future, Sheila? Not looking for a settlement from me, I take it?"

"No," she replied. "And I wouldn't accept one if you offered it. I expect to work."

"A job in sight?"

"No."

"Think you'd relish clerking again?"

"It isn't a question of what I'd like," she said. "But I ought to do better than that with the education you have given me. I never knew what it meant to think till I went to Miss Perrin's."

"And here's a sample!" threw in Tom bitterly. "As soon as she learns to think she wants to divorce me."

"Perfectly true," agreed Mrs. Ballantine, forgetting that she and Tom were estranged. "That Miss Perrin is a dangerous woman."

"No," said Sheila. "She is a wonderful woman — fine all through." Her glance came back to Roger. "I could thank you on my knees for giving me the chance to know her. It's part of my debt."

"Which you want to square?"

"Yes."

"By shirking your duty — breaking a solemn contract — killing this boy's faith in womankind?"

She caught her breath.

"You — you surely don't look at it that way!"

"It's one way of looking at it."

"It's the only way," said Tom, seizing his advantage. "You've got the wrong slant on it, Sheila. Do chuck this rubbish and be your own dear self. I know I've devilled you about Lounsbury, and I'm ashamed of myself and sorry. But, after all, it showed that I care for you. You know I care. You know that nobody could ever mean to me what you mean. You can't — if you're sane, if you still love me as you say you do — you can't walk out of my life in this heartless fashion."

"Heartless! Oh, Tom, if you only knew —"

She met his gaze an instant and with an unhappy sigh again faced his father. "If I must seem a selfish beast, why I must," she said. "But I'm not thinking of myself. I only want to — to —"

"To do the right thing as you see it?" said Roger.

"Yes," she returned eagerly; "the right thing by you. I came out of nowhere, and you trusted me — as no one was ever trusted. And now I want to make it up to you, to pay — to pay —"

"But it isn't payment you're suggesting. It's bankruptcy. You are proposing, not to meet your obligations, but to scuttle away from them."

Her stricken eyes admitted defeat.

"There is nothing more I can say."

"I should hope not!" came explosively from Mrs. Ballantine. "This whole scene has been most uncalled for. You might at least have waited till Tom had taken his degree."

Sheila did not hear. She was confronting Tom's father in pale desperation. She must undeceive him. Daddy Joe would forgive her when he knew all.

"There is something more — something which I —"

Roger's hand shot out in an imperative gesture.

"Not another word," he charged. "I've heard enough of this wild talk of renunciation. It's like anarchy — heaven in theory and hell in practice. Get it out of your head. And now," he ended, with a smile, "let's make a fresh start with a clean slate."

He put his arm round her and at his touch she hid her face against his breast.

"I can't go on with it," she sobbed. "I can't —"

His sleeve smothered the confession she would have babbled in frantic haste.

"Sure you can't," he said. "The discussion is closed. Don't let me hear any more nonsense about debts. Never again. I mean it, and you'll stay here in the stocks till you realize that I mean it. You've been under a strain for months. Your nerves are on edge. But you have stood the test, and I'm satisfied. Do you get that straight? I'm satisfied. In every respect. That doesn't mean that I think you're faultless. I don't. But, all the same, I wouldn't trade you for a saint with a certified halo. You are going to be a real daughter to mother and me and as good a wife to Tom as you think he deserves."

And Sheila, with mingled gratitude and shame, held her peace. She had been sincere in her offer. Hard as was the choice, it had seemed easier than its alternative. But the courage which had carried her over the threshold had failed her miserably in the end. And she was glad that it had failed, glad that Roger had silenced her, for, though she felt a creature devoid of honor and of will, her relief was ineffable. Left alone with Tom, she clung to him in wordless thanksgiving. She was drugged with a reckless, guilty, exquisite happiness. Nothing counted but love. And Love, made mortal, beyond peradventure wore the godlike face and form, the irreproachable summer tweeds, of Thomas Ballantine.

By and by they went out together. No Copley-Plaza dinner under the parental eye for Tom! He guided her to a far less modern hostel in a far less modern quarter. The china was as sturdy as the fare, but the presiding genius was a man of feeling, his tables were thoughtfully disposed in alcoves, his

very servitors had souls which still quickened to romance. And when they had eaten what it pleased heaven to set before them and had squandered the riches of the language in vain sketches of each other's charms, they sauntered forth under the stars. Was there ever such a night! They came to the Common. What a humdrum name for Arcady! The elms were ravishingly beautiful. The amorous Bostonians in their shadows were beautiful too. Who called this cold New England?

A quarter to eleven saw them benignly chaperoned by the statue of Phillips Brooks. They had strolled with laggard steps up Boylston Street. They had compassed Trinity only one time less than on the seventh day the children of Israel compassed Jericho. And Tom was still unready to yield her up.

"I thought I'd lost you forever," he said. "Even now I'm haunted by a fear that something horrible will happen before Thursday."

"Nothing can part us but death."

"Don't speak of death!"

"I couldn't help thinking of it back there — when we passed those old gravestones — of how terrible it would be — now. You do feel well, don't you, Tom?"

"Look at me!" he invited. "But you, darling — you are thinner than you were. And you're very pale."

"Who wouldn't be under this electric light?"

"By daylight too. I noticed it this afternoon — even while I was brute enough —"

"Hush!" she said. "We agreed to forget all that."

"I know. And we will. But you do need toning up. You are tired, that's the truth of it."

"Not really tired. It's been perfect to-night."

"Hasn't it? And we're only at the beginning. If it weren't for the look of it, I'd cut all this week's foolery — just decamp with you this minute and let my B.A. follow by mail."

"Would you, dear?"

"Wouldn't you?"

"I love you," she said softly.

He adored a moment in silence.

"I'm stark — staring — raving — mad about you," he declared. "Thursday!" He heaved a mighty sigh. "It seems a million years off. Why in the name of destiny can't they let Commencement follow Class Day? It's idiotic to sandwich a useless day between."

"Why do they? Does nothing happen?"

"Sports!" he ejaculated in withering scorn. "Athletic meets — the second ball game with Yale. And of course the old grads will be powwowing all over the place. The hotels are full of them already. They're the ones who want to string things out."

These oldsters were clearly superfluous.

"But Class Day," she said. "You wouldn't miss that?"

"Wouldn't I! To be with you — away from everybody! But it wouldn't be fair to you, dear."

"It wouldn't be fair to your people."

"No," he admitted. "They're entitled to the show. Not that father will think much of it, though. This cap-and-gown, lawn fête, confetti stuff won't appeal to him."

It appealed to her.

"I can't wait to see you in your cap and gown," she said. "Are they becoming?"

"I look like an undertaker."

"I don't believe it."

"You'll see."

"I know I shall be proud of you — that you belong to me. I always am. Sometimes I — I simply choke up when I'm with you."

His mind centered on this delicious revelation.

"Do you, Sheila!" he cried, and then, in sudden humility: "I'm not so much."

"There's nobody like you."

"Nor like you. But this feeling that comes to you? Tell me more about it."

The miracle baffled analysis.

"I can't describe it," she said. "It just rushes over me that you are so — so dear."

"That's love," he said solemnly. "Real love. And it's exactly the way — only more so — that I feel about you. We were meant for each other, darling, from the beginning of time. I used to scoff at that kind of thing. But now —" He repudiated his heresy in a long-drawn "Gee!"

"Words aren't much use, are they?"

"We don't need them."

"No," she said. "We know."

Their gaze had the fixity of the bronze bishop's overhead. Then a near-by clock struck eleven, and other clocks more remote attested with tiresome certainty that eleven was correct.

"If they're so infernally positive, it must be true," he lamented. "I ought not to have kept you out so

long. You'll be up late to-morrow night at the senior spread and dance, and I want you to cast all the other girls in the shade. But I haven't said half the things I want to say."

"We've years ahead of us."

"Not to straighten out one or two matters. We must settle about the Lounsburys."

"Must we, Tom? To-night!"

"Don't be alarmed. We won't differ on that score again. I can be sorry for Stoughton now. He's going to be hard hit, Sheila, and that's why I want you to know that I shan't be touchy about your dancing with him."

"But I don't want to dance with him," she protested.

"He'll ask you, and of course I'll have to ask his sisters. You don't dread meeting him, do you?"

"Dread?"

"Because he went to the school at Easter? You've never told me what took place — I hate to dig this up and, by George, I won't — but I know he didn't go up there to talk about the weather."

Sheila took hold of his lapel.

"Tom!"

"Yes?"

"I can tell you now — you're so fair and reasonable. He came to ask me to marry him."

"My God! And you — you allowed him to do it?"

"Tom!"

"I mean — well, it strikes me that you might have seen it coming. But no matter. What did you say?"

“Was there more than one thing I could say?”

“Of course not. But — his telling me, his manner? Do you mean that he wouldn’t take no for an answer?”

“Yes,” she replied. “It wasn’t anything I could help, Tom.”

“I suppose not,” he said with labored impartiality. “I can see how he’d stick to his point. This *is* an awkward mess!” He thought strenuously. “Oh, well; you may not be thrown together to any great extent. He’ll be busy with his own crowd Class Day. As for to-morrow evening” — he threw back his shoulders — “what I said goes. There won’t be any dog-in-the-manger spirit on my part.”

They walked rather soberly toward the hotel.

“I *am* sorry for him,” reaffirmed Tom, as if committing a lesson. “I can afford to be.”

Sheila pursued her own train of thought.

“I wish I knew what to say to Molly.”

“You’ll have it out with her?”

“I couldn’t let her hear through some one else or the newspapers.”

“I hope there won’t be a break,” he said. “I know you’re fond of her.”

She did not reply, and his face clouded.

“Hang it all!” he exclaimed. “I wish I’d kept quiet till to-morrow. You feel this more than you’re willing to admit.”

Sheila pressed his arm against her young breast.

“I’ll have you,” she said.

CHAPTER TWENTY

HE was back in the morning before she was fully dressed and ate a second breakfast in her company. Love never impaired Tom's appetite. Roger had long since risen and departed to inspect his local branches; Mrs. Ballantine was planning to go out with New York acquaintances she had run across in the hotel. The day was theirs.

"We'll do anything you say," he told her.

"I'll do anything you say."

"Jove! but you're lovely. You must have had a good night's rest."

"I did."

"Dream of me?"

"No-o. But I went to sleep thinking of you."

"And I of you. And I dreamed of you too."

"Did you?"

"Yes — that it was Thursday."

She looked at him from under her lashes and smiled.

"I —" she began, and then her voice trailed off in a soft "Oh, Tom!"

He became a wizard of intuition.

"That choky feeling?"

"Y-e-s."

"You're an angel!"

They vied in descriptive epithets for an interval

and, as ever, came to a breathless stop because of the futility of words.

"But how about to-day, Sheila? You decide."

"It's all new to me."

"Boston?"

"Boston — Cambridge — everything."

"Perhaps we'd better stick to the Hub. You'll see Cambridge to-night and to-morrow, and the day after, and the next — Great Guns! but Thursday is a long way off!" He wrenched his thoughts from its remoteness. "What shall I show you? What's the most interesting thing in Boston, anyhow?"

"You."

"Wrong," he laughed. "It's you."

"Then we've seen the chief wonders. But what do Harvard men usually come in town for? Let's pretend we're freshmen."

"Heaven forbid! We'd bring up in a police station."

"Were you so wicked?"

"No," he answered with candid eyes. "But I was an awful ass. Don't you care where we go?"

"Not a fig — so long as we go together."

"Same here."

In this debonair mood they idled amidst certain of Boston's most cherished treasures and venerated scenes, and then, overtaken by hunger, at the stroke of twelve dashed for the nearest restaurant. They devoted the next two hours to luncheon and two hours more to a motor ride through hilly suburbs on the city's western fringe. Now and then they even looked out of the tonneau at the changing view. In fact they noticed quite half a dozen dwellings in

which they agreed it would be delightful to live. At four o'clock they stopped at a tea house beside a river, but were equal only to ice cream and a special cake which it appeared that all patrons of the tea house ordered. A little after five they reached the hotel and heroically parted, he to fly to Cambridge to dress, she to rest against the further strain of dinner and the senior spread. As she dozed off, Sheila recalled an edifying mural decoration in the Public Library. It had furnished a sumptuous background for a bold, surreptitious, electrifying kiss. The little memories of travel are often curiously distinct.

The hotel was over-populated that evening with men of forty odd who, despite their advanced years, seemed gay of heart. Tom explained that 'Ninety-five was celebrating its twentieth anniversary.

"Poor old things!" said Sheila, moved by their senile glee. "I suppose that for one night they're trying to feel young again."

Tom's compassion was less profound.

"I hope I'll have the sense to pass up class reunions when I get that far along," he remarked. "To say nothing of trying to dance! It's sickening nowadays the way such fossils butt into parties and cop out the pretty girls."

But across the Charles that night youth had the right of way. John Harvard sat his pedestal in the Delta with the air of a man who had not lived in vain. Even the puritan worthies in frigid marble and stiffly painted canvas who dignify, if they do not grace, the walls of Memorial Hall seemed humanized in spite of themselves as they looked down on these frivolous heirs of a great tradition. To Sheila they

were only a degree more ancient than the patriarchs of 'Ninety-five she had glimpsed at the Copley-Plaza, but they had their part in the thrill with which she launched on her first dance. This place of lofty arches, and stained glass, and busts, and portraits, and storied memories was the heart of Harvard! And Tom was one of Harvard's veritable sons! She felt that she had done him scant justice. Who was she to treat his merits so lightly? He gained in stature in her arms, increased in wisdom.

Whereupon Tom dropped a pearl from his learned store.

"They can't touch you," he said. "Not one of the bunch."

Superb, royal, incredible tribute!

"You say that to please me," she returned, hoping to hear it again.

"No," he declared. "That is my calm unbiased judgment. You put it over every girl here. And they know it, believe me. I've seen their glances."

So had Sheila, and their partners' glances as well. Toward whichever point she circled in the waltz, there they were with their mute admissions and their offerings.

"I'll be popular with my crowd to-night," said Tom. "They'll stampede to meet you."

He indicated various members of his society — jolly looking chaps who had not studied themselves into eye-glasses or spectacles — and Sheila decided that if the stampede came off she could face it with fortitude. It crossed her mind also that it might shorten, if not avert, an embarrassing moment with Stoughton Lounsbury. She had not spied him yet,

but he had haunted the outskirts of her thoughts since her arrival and before that, indeed, at frequent intervals throughout the day. Neither she nor Tom had alluded to Stoughton, however, and her first inkling that he was likewise obsessed came when he addressed her with sudden gravity.

"You'll see him in a minute," he warned. "He's just coming through that door."

Then the significantly unnamed entered the hall with Molly, met Sheila's eyes with just such a look as she had foreseen, waved a greeting, which his sister supplemented with a nod and a smile, and began dancing in their wake.

"I thought I'd tip you off," said Tom, calm with might and main.

"Thank you, dear."

They danced a few yards.

"He's trailing as near as possible."

"Can't we let them go by?"

"Not very well."

Then Tom discovered a clear channel along the wall and attempted a dash, but his strategy was wasted, and he issued another feverish bulletin.

"No use! He's bound to follow us to the end."

"We might slip out at the next doorway," she suggested.

"Just what he'd like! Stick to the hall, by all means."

Sheila flushed with the ardor of the chase.

"He may not ask me to dance, Tom, but if he does, and you'd prefer to have me, I'll make some excuse. I'd rather stop dancing — even leave — than worry you."

"Why should I worry?" he retorted. "It's you I want to spare. Better dance with him and be done with it. I'll take on Molly and keep as close as I can and then rush up some fellow to be introduced."

As the music died away, young Lounsbury deftly twirled his sister to a standstill alongside the fugitives, and Sheila turned a somewhat wistful smile on fate. Molly greeted her as if they had been sundered a year, Stoughton as if he had waited a millennium, and Tom, pumping up small talk, beheld their group of four cleave into its predestined pairs. From the corner of her eye Sheila saw him drift wanly to his doom and in the same breath replied to Stoughton.

"No," she said. "It's not taken. We've only just come. A fox-trot? How nice! This is such a good one, isn't it? 'Tickling Love Taps' — what a funny name!"

He distanced Tom with the very tactics Tom had used to no avail and, with a long reach of the crowded floor between, bent his head to intercept her errant glance.

"This isn't charity, I hope?"

"Charity?"

"Not quite in your good graces, am I?"

"I'm not offended," she said, "if that is what you mean."

"You've forgiven me?"

"There's nothing to forgive."

The running step of the version then in vogue of this sprightly dance made its exacting demands, and when they again slowed to a walk she herself seized the lead.

"Won't you be sorry to leave such a wonderful place as this?"

"I don't eat in Memorial," he teased. "You know this is a restaurant, to say nothing of a so-called theater and a kind of Valhalla."

"I meant Harvard, of course. I'm sure I should hate to say good-by to it if I were a man."

"It's too sad to dwell upon," he laughed. "Let's talk about you instead. You're twice as bewitching as I remembered, and I thought I remembered everything about you — your least look or tone or gesture."

She was at a loss how to answer this, but another little run covered her uncertainty.

"One can't fox-trot and talk," he complained. "Can't I coax you out in the transept for the rest of this?"

"But we've just begun."

"I may not have another chance to-night to speak to you."

"Perhaps to-morrow —"

"Class Day! A senior doesn't have time to draw his breath. Don't put me off, Sheila. There hasn't been a day since I saw you that I haven't longed to see you again. Not one! And if I loved you in April, I worship you in June."

"But I told you —"

"I know what you told me. I've forgotten nothing that happened — nothing."

She scoured the nearer scene for rescue, but Tom had become one of many dark-coated and white-trousered seniors. She tried to ignore the implication of Stoughton's last words, but he underlined his meaning.

"I'll never forget, Sheila. Nor, I think, will you."

It was folly to palter with such a situation.

"I'm ready to stop dancing," she said abruptly.

"You'll let me take you out?" His eyes glowed.

"For a moment."

They pushed through the corridor under the gallery, came out into the vaulted solemnity of the transept, passed sepulchral tablets inset in somber Gothic frames, and so reached a quiet corner at the foot of a winding stair.

He faced her eagerly.

"It was bully of you to come," he said. "And of your own free will."

"I came because you forced me to do it."

"Don't say that! I hoped it meant —"

"It meant only that I wish — that I must clear things up. You had no right to say what you did."

"But *can* you forget?" he challenged.

"Won't you listen? I tried to make you see — then — that I did not care for you in that way."

"But you will — as I told you then. You'll come to it in the end. Such love as mine must wake yours some day. Don't fight against it. Yield to it as you — as I thought for a moment you did yield. I can't stop hoping with such a memory as that —"

"You must —"

"No. It was too real for a fool's paradise. Don't try to blot it out. Believe in it as I believe in it."

"But it was a fool's paradise. You must not believe in it. It was all a mistake, and if there had been time, if Miss Perrin had not come back, I would have made you understand that it was. It hurts

me to say this. I like you too much for it not to hurt. But it's all I can say — ”

“At present? Yes; I realize that, Sheila. I'd hoped that by now you might know your own heart. But how can you without really knowing me? I keep forgetting that. I'll have to wait, of course, and I'll try to wait patiently — not hound you every time we meet. It will mean making myself over. Whenever I've seen a thing I wanted, I've gone for it, gone for it hard — and got it. Perhaps it was the wrong way — it must have been — to win you. It may have given you a false idea of me — repelled you. But I am not a bundle of conceit. If I ever had any conceit you've taken it out of me. I'm just yours — all yours — forever.”

She saw only one course and cast about for words to tell him, not too harshly, the truth to which he was so blind.

“It's I who have given a false impression,” she said unsteadily. “I have not meant to do it. Truly I haven't! I beg you to believe this, for I care what you think — you and Molly. I'll always be glad that we were friends, good friends, for a little while. But — oh, why did you come at Easter? Why do you make it so hard for me now? Don't you see — ”

“I see that I'm spoiling the night for you, dear heart,” he stopped her. “Let's don't say any more. You're simply trying to say again that you don't love me, and that will spoil my night too. I'm sorry I dragged you into this. I want you to enjoy the dance, every minute of it, and of Class Day and of all your days — world without end.

Isn't that Ballantine over there, looking six ways at once?"

It was, and Sheila, a barometer to his every mood, sensed the brewing storm. The old jealousy had downed the new resolution. He was frowning before he sighted her and, when his roving glance lit upon their corner, he flushed a fiery red and strode toward them.

"The fox-trot is over and half of a one-step," he announced austerely.

Young Lounsbury was so injudicious as to grin.

"So?" he drawled. "Cutting them rather short, aren't they?"

"On the contrary."

"Did you want the one-step with me, Tom?" asked Sheila, anxious to soothe.

"No," he answered brusquely. "But a friend of mine did. In fact several men have asked to meet you."

Stoughton stared at his tone.

"My fault entirely," he said. "I didn't realize that I had kept Sh — Miss Moore — out here so long." He bowed to her with a look which another lover might well deem fond and turned away.

"Wait a minute," called Tom, still scarlet and still brusque. "I've a piece of news for you."

"News?"

"In confidence — till after Commencement. We're married."

Lounsbury paled to the lips.

"Married!" he repeated. "Married!" And then: "Sheila! Is this true?"

"Yes," she said, her face as white as his. "Since

last autumn. It was kept secret on Tom's account. His father wished him to graduate. I—I couldn't explain."

The grief in her eyes spoke to the grief in his. He straightened, and brushing by Tom, took her hand.

"I can't say that *you* haven't played fair," he said. "I hope you will be happy."

He walked away with shoulders square and head erect.

"I had to do it," began Tom defensively. "He got my goat."

She could not look at him.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

SHE had partners galore. But her dancing and her talk were like the lesser dexterities of a juggler. Her real thoughts rang the changes on that scene in the transept, so vivid in its revelation, so sharp in its contrasts. Pity she felt, a vicarious shame, but she was too dismayed for anger. One could not be angry with a cyclone or a flood. Tom's act was elemental.

From time to time she caught sight of Stoughton. Pride had come to his aid. He was looking after his sisters, dancing with them and other girls, making conversation like herself, but with what an effort she plainly saw. His face was drawn, his smile a tense travesty of mirth. Once, while she pretended to eat an ice, he stood almost within touch, but they shunned each other's eyes. The wise youth beside her was defining the spirit which set his Alma Mater apart from all others, but his words, like his face and name, were veiled in fog. She felt vastly older than this cocksure boy, older than John Harvard, holding his bronze folio in his bronze chair.

Tom came to her at midnight.

"We'll go when you are ready, Sheila."

"I have been ready for hours," she replied.

"I suppose that means I knocked all the fun out of your evening at the start," he said stiffly. "But don't lose sight of the fact that, if you hadn't shilly-shallied at Easter, there would have been no such mix-up to-night."

He could not know how deeply he had pierced the weak joint in her armor, but the chance thrust sharply reminded her that it was to him, first and last, that she owed her loyalty.

"We must forget this, Tom," she said. "Let's don't speak of it again."

The latter course was not difficult. He was as eager to be quit of the topic as she. But to forget was clearly beyond her power till she should drop Cambridge over the horizon's rim. When she returned in the morning with Roger and Mrs. Ballantine, she could think of little else than the painful hazard of encountering Stoughton Lounsbury. Her fancy misled her in the crowded Square. She espied him in imagination from a window in Tom's study. When the black line of seniors left Holworthy and began its quaint round of the Yard to cheer the buildings, it was not Tom she first identified, nor, in anything that followed, was it Tom who stood out from his classmates.

But the chance and her dread of a meeting waned. She had not foreseen the thousands who thronged the Yard when the exercises in Sanders were over nor the distractions of color and music and dancing and feasting which went on under a fickle sky, now blue and sunny, now threatening downpour. Which of the tents that mushroomed everywhere sheltered the spread in which Lounsbury was most concerned

she neither knew nor conjectured. Tom's society was in possession of the gymnasium, and Tom's friends, the dancing partners of last night, hemmed her about till the drift toward Soldiers' Field began.

The Stadium was not another Yale Bowl, but the likeness was near enough to stir memories of a day when she was far lighter of heart. Mrs. Ballantine, full of a fussy curiosity as to who was who, chided her for letting her wits go wool-gathering at such a time, but Roger, digesting his impressions in silence, glanced his sympathy. Then, not far distant, her eye fell on the Lounsbury girls, with their father and mother, and at the same instant Molly singled her out and smilingly beckoned her to a seat beside her. Sheila shook her head.

"Now why in the world did you do that?" asked Mrs. Ballantine.

"Does it matter?"

"Matter! Don't you see that they know everybody around them — those Boston people? I am afraid you are being influenced by Tom's narrow views."

Her inconsistency was past making out. Sheila banished it from her weary brain and watched the long procession of the classes wind into the arena. They were in most part a gay-hued, fantastic company. One of the groups had even masked itself in the body of a green dragon with gaping jaws and scarlet tail. The seniors, who came last of all, looked like sober crows amidst parrots. She tried to lose herself in the spectacle; to pin her attention to the cheering, the ivy oration, and the songs of the glee club; to thrill at the confetti scrimmage which in these degenerate days has supplanted the ruder battle round

the Tree. She said to herself that this was Class Day — Tom's Class Day; she must enjoy it. But instead she thought of Daddy Joe and Roger Ballantine and Stoughton Lounsbury and all the mad, sad mess of things which had flowed from a simple "yes" spoken before an official grotesquely called a justice of the peace.

The lowering sky sent the crowd scurrying, and in the general flight Sheila thankfully escaped a meeting howsoever brief with Molly. She suspected nothing, of course — her greeting showed that Stoughton had kept the bitter news to himself; but to talk with her again without telling her the truth was an unthinkable hypocrisy, and Sheila had determined to say what must be said in writing. But the rain which spared her an added pang also washed the bloom from the festival. A garden party driven to shelter is not inspiring. The guests made an effort to be gay, but the effort was more apparent than the gayety. The spreads lost their enticement, the dances their sparkle. The outdoor drizzle diffused an indoor damp. In pairs, trios, half-dozens, then droves, people dashed for taxis, limousines, street cars, and the maw of the Boston subway. Tom's Class Day joined the historic past.

Wednesday, that useless hiatus, went swiftly. Sheila rose late, but tardy as was her breakfast, Tom had not come. Toward noon he telephoned that he had been busy with his preparations for leaving Cambridge and asked whether she would care to see the baseball game with Yale, but she declined, and the afternoon was nearly spent when he reached the hotel. Meanwhile she had written and destroyed

note after note to Molly. One was too long, another brief to curtness, a third seemed unduly apologetic, a fourth dripped melancholy. The version she finally mailed to the Touraine, where Molly had mentioned that they were stopping, satisfied her in nothing, but she was feverishly anxious to be done with it. Lame as it was, it released her from a burden, and she met Tom with a smile which routed the last vestige of restraint. They dined with his people, and all four went to a musical comedy of Roger's selection. He complained of brain fag after Harvard plus Boston.

Back at the hotel, Tom bade her a sedate good night in the sitting room of their suite and then slipped round to her outer door.

"Did you ring, madam?" he asked gravely, when she answered his discreet tap.

"No," she said, "but here is something for your trouble." And she put her lips to the narrow opening.

"What a stingy tip!"

"Don't be greedy."

He whipped inside, and they achieved a fair compromise.

"I couldn't go without a real good night," he said. "I had to know this way — heart to heart — that nothing is changed. I felt like a dog all yesterday and to-day."

"Don't," she begged. "We've agreed to bury all that."

"So we shall. And everything else that's made us unhappy. Do you love me as much as you did in September?"

"More."

"You've found out my faults."

"And you mine."

"You have no big ones."

"Nor you."

"You're an angel to say so. But, whether I have or not, dear, you'll see that I'm a different man with all this hellish separation and secrecy at an end. Do you realize that this is our last parting?"

"Yes."

"Are you glad?"

"Glad doesn't express it, Tom."

"We'll never leave each other again," he declared. "If business — anything — takes me away from home for more than a day, along you'll go. We'll do everything together, tell each other everything, grow to know each other's very thoughts. Isn't that your ideal of a perfect marriage?"

She nodded, but the ideal was rather appalling in its perfection, and she envisioned a droll picture of two clairvoyants tenanted a glass house. Then Tom, once more a sturdy realist, kissed her an impassioned farewell, and she became merely a girl in love.

Her morning mood was hardly less exalted. The first sound she heard was the trill of the telephone at her bedside and, after a moment of drowsy wonder, she propped herself on her pillow and took the instrument from its stand.

"Is that you, Sheila?"

"Tom! What is it? What has happened?"

"Sunrise," he said jubilantly. "This is the day."

"You — you are up?"

"These two hours. Don't tell me that you aren't!"

"I was sound asleep when you called."

"And you're half asleep now?"

"N-o."

"I wanted my voice to be the first to wish you happiness."

"How dear of you, Tom!"

"You are happy, aren't you?"

"So happy that I — but I can't tell you over the telephone."

"Nothing but profanity is barred."

"I couldn't," she laughed. "But you know."

"Yes," he said, "I know. We've our own wireless system, haven't we? I can even see you."

"Mercy! I hope not."

"You're twice as pretty with your hair in a braid. And, as for —"

"Never mind the rest. I feel as if all Boston were listening."

"Let 'em," he said recklessly. "But I mustn't delay you. Is everything packed?"

"Almost everything."

"My traps went to the dock last night. Well — good-by, dear."

"Good-by."

"For the last time."

"For the last time."

Her heart brimmed with a tremulous happiness which she would have had everybody share. She would have forgiven the most implacable of enemies had there been one to forgive. But the world seemed to hold only friends. Every face gave back her own joy in life and love. Facing the inevitable, even

Tom's mother became her kindlier self. Not by word or look did she mar the final hours. Her son was the lodestar of her eyes and thoughts, but so he was of Sheila's. For both Commencement had its being solely to do him honor. The pundits in red hoods and blue, the Sheriff of Middlesex and his sword, the Governor of the Commonwealth, his staff and his lancers, all the august figures and sonorous ritual were merely satellites and scenic pomp for Thomas Ballantine, bachelor of arts.

The hero himself was more concerned with the fact that he was a benedict. He joined them all smiles, careless of his parchment, eager to shed the robes of scholarship from his shoulders and shake the dust of Cambridge from his feet.

"Don't you wish to say good-by to your friends?" asked his mother.

"Once is enough," he replied. "I rounded them up bright and early. Did you motor out?"

"The bridal car is waiting round the corner," said Roger. "We'll ride in town with you if you don't mind."

"We'll let you," laughed Tom. "Just stop near my rooms a minute while I pick up a bag."

He linked arms gayly with Sheila and, turning, faced the assembled Lounsburys. The two families met, bowed and passed all in an instant, but the time was not too short for Sheila to seek Molly's eyes and find them averted. She was gravely intent on some object in the elm-arched street.

Tom was still far from adept at mind-reading.

"Lounsbury didn't seem unfriendly," he commented in a low voice. "I presume he sees that there's

something to be said on our side. Probably Molly will feel the same when she hears. Did you decide to write her?"

"Yes." She contrived to smile. "It seemed best."

Why tell him now that she had both written and had her answer? Or why tell herself? She must heed Sophie's wise counsel, pin her mind and faith on the big facts.

They were striking enough in all truth. It had fallen to the lot of few girls, surely, to receive an engagement ring three quarters of a year after her wedding as did she, when Tom came beaming from his dormitory. Her left hand went ungloved to Boston. And who could ask a marriage feast more sumptuous than Roger Ballantine had ordered? He had thought of everything — decorations, orange blossoms, a cake of monumental splendor. And such a gift! Beneath her napkin was a leather case, and in the case lay coiled the fulfillment of every jewel-loving woman's dream.

"Pearls!" she exclaimed. "For me!" Tears hid the necklace, choked her voice. "Oh, I can't take them — I can't —"

"Try them on, anyhow," said Roger. "I daresay they'll feel like any other beads in time."

They were still in her possession two hours later when she and Tom trod a wharf that smelled of spices and, entering the waiting launch, sped down the harbor toward the shining yacht. Pearls might be beyond the deserts of Sheila Moore, but who could deny that they were in keeping for Sheila Ballantine? They were part and parcel of her new kingdom, a

ceremonial detail like the salute of the captain who stood at the head of the ladder of that rich man's toy, the *Pastime*.

They raced back on deck like children at the first stroke of the propeller, and Tom tucked her into a rug and sat at her feet as they glided past the islands and headed up the bay. They agreed that the view was superb and dismissed it. The nearer scene was too absorbing. Tom eyed the marvel that was his as if only now he realized her unique and dazzling loveliness. Nothing about her was too trivial for study. She invested the least of her belongings with interest, and when her purse, which from prudent habit she had brought to the deck, slipped from her lap and opened, its feminine trinkets straightway attracted his lover's gaze.

"Do you mind if I look?" he asked.

"Why not?" she laughed. "Aren't you my husband?"

He turned over its contents — a vanity box, money, a handkerchief, a cobweb of a veil — and then, exploring an inner pocket, drew forth a ragged clipping.

"Eh!" he said. "'Pam, Lew: Poli's, Scranton.' What the deuce is this, Sheila?"

She stared at it in dismay. So much had happened since the lonely hour which had moved her to treasure that scrap of paper!

"Had you forgotten it?"

"Yes," she said.

"But why did you keep it at all? What are Lew Pam's doings to you?"

"I kept it — you won't understand — I kept it because I know as you cannot how good he is —"

Tom smiled.

"I know how good you are," he said. "But I don't want any one but myself in your thoughts to-day."

He tossed the clipping over the rail.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

EVERY nightfall saw them anchored in some picturesque haven, every day found them rambling ashore or sailing tranquil summer seas. In this wise they idled up the coast to Bar Harbor, visiting Marblehead, Gloucester, Portsmouth, and Portland on the way, and then, doubling back, touched at Salem because they had forgotten it on the northward cruise, and made straight for the gray shaft towering above the utmost sand dunes of Cape Cod. From Provincetown they tracked the *Mayflower* to Plymouth and, scorning the new canal as too prosaic, put into Provincetown for a second night, rounded the cape at sunrise and, with a placid ocean before them, adventured to Nantucket. An island still so quaint as to ban the automobile was not to be covered in a day, so they gave it two. But Martha's Vineyard suffered by contrast and, paying it merely a call, they explored Buzzards Bay at leisure and, finally, of a blue and gold morning, forsook the Massachusetts shore and entered Newport.

Sheila would have been content with the harbor view, for to her Newport spelled Lounsbury, but when Tom proposed a closer survey of the seats of the mighty she did not demur. The town was larger

than she had thought, and the chance of meeting any one she knew seemed slight.

"I suppose we can see all that's worth seeing in an hour or two," she suggested.

"We'll take as long as we please," said Tom, and significantly added: "There is no reason why we should hurry through."

They landed near the Jamestown ferry and, engaging the first vehicle for hire, by the fortune of travel drew upon their heads a torrent of local history and backstairs gossip. Their driver spared them nothing from Lover's Lane to Purgatory and lavished cynical comment on objects as diverse as the Old Stone Mill and Bailey's Beach. But the strangely assorted palaces of the money kings were the theme he truly delighted to embroider. Modern or mediæval, beautiful or grotesque, he tagged each with its price mark and most with a scandal which he expurgated with reluctance. "Such doings! If it weren't for the young lady's presence —!"

What a ghoul he was, this man! Sheila wished that she might have dreamed in happy ignorance through this pleasure city set upon a rock, knowing nothing of its story, spurious or real, free to people it with such beings as should dwell in such a garden. She caught Tom's glance, and it reflected her own disenchantment. In another moment he had stopped the sordid chronicle, paid the fellow off, and was racing her down a street of heavy shadows toward a vista of clean water and pure sky.

"That blackguard!" he exclaimed as they reached the Cliff Walk. "Phew! A salt breeze never felt so good."

Sheila linked her fingers in his.

"I'm glad I belong to you," she said. "You're so wholesome."

They stood looking seaward.

"Of course they aren't all unspeakable," said Tom. "Everybody knows how easy it is for a few to give a bad name to a class."

"Yes," she assented. "Take Pittsburg!"

"I noticed he didn't besmirch the Lounsburys — never even pointed out their house."

"Molly told me that it isn't one of the show places."

"A lucky thing it isn't, if they care for their reputation! But this is their world, all the same, and they must like it, or they'd get out. They aren't prisoners."

Sheila thought of certain confidences.

"I wonder?" she said.

They sauntered from Ochre Point to the Forty Steps, followed the lure of arching foliage for a time, came out on Bellevue Avenue near the Casino and, striking downhill past the huddled graves and bleak dignity of Trinity, crossed Thames Street and regained the region of the docks. Their way now led by a dozen or more motors awaiting the ferry. The majority were touring cars, stained with travel, but midway in the double file glittered a limousine as patently fresh from its garage as was its dainty occupant from the hands of her maid. Then the girl turned her head and Sheila, looking into the eyes of Molly Lounsbury, saw them for the same frank, fond eyes she had grown to love.

"You, Sheila!" She flung open the door. "Did you drop from the sky?"

Sheila's heart leaped at her tone.

"No," she laughed, her face radiant. "We came in a yacht."

They kissed with their old affection, and Molly held out her hand to Tom.

"Congratulations!" she said. "You've married the girl I would have married had I been a man."

He murmured his thanks with mounting color and, disgusted at his blushes, blushed the more. Molly considerably shifted her gaze to Sheila and asked a question or two about their cruise.

"Have you picked up your mail anywhere?" she went on.

"No," said Sheila.

"Then of course you haven't read the letter I sent to your New York address."

"You wrote me?"

"As soon as I received your note — the night after Commencement."

"The night after? I mailed it the day before."

"So I saw. But father dropped it in his pocket and forgot it." She regarded her closely. "Surely you didn't think that I knew and let you leave Boston without — why, Sheila! Don't you know me better than that?"

"I ought to have known you better. Forgive me."

The ferry sidled into its slip, the chauffeurs of the adjoining cars started their engines and prepared to jockey for a favored position. Molly caught at her hand.

"How can I go now!" she exclaimed. "But why can't you come with me? I must keep an engagement at Narragansett Pier, but it won't take me long, and

I'll bring you back before evening. Do come — both of you!"

Tom answered for both.

"It's very kind of you," he said with no great fervor. "But we're pulling out at once."

The girls exchanged a look which deplored the subjection of women and pledged their friendship anew.

"You'll keep a corner in your heart for me, Sheila?"

"Always. Whether we see each other or not."

"Of course we'll see each other," said Molly, as her car moved on. "And soon!"

They walked in silence to the launch and in silence rode through the anchored fleet of pleasure craft to the *Pastime*. Tom ignored the retreating ferry and presently, when they quitted the harbor, he ignored Newport too. He seemed to wish to drop it over the rail as he had dropped the distasteful souvenir of Lew Pam.

With the wisdom of a wife longer schooled in matrimony, Sheila forbore to disturb his meditations and, soothed by luncheon, he brightened.

"Did I seem curt when I refused that invitation?" he asked.

"You certainly showed that you didn't care to go."

"Would you have gone, Sheila?"

"I think so. She so clearly wished to be nice to me — and to you, Tom."

"She was civil to me on your account. I saw nothing to gush over."

"Did I gush?"

"You asked her to forgive you. What was underneath that talk about letters?"

She explained and added: "I couldn't speak of it at the time. It would have spoiled our day."

"Not for me. I want to hear everything at all times. You should have brought this up before. Perhaps she did cut you and repented of it."

"She's incapable of such deceit."

"They wouldn't bat an eye over such a trifle in her circle."

"Molly is different. You know it as well as I, Tom. Don't you want me to care for her?"

"Not so deeply that you'll miss her."

"Yet that first night in Boston you told me you hoped there wouldn't be a break between us."

"Yes," he admitted.

"Didn't you mean what you said?"

"Yes. But I did not give it much thought. It's her set — not Molly — that I can't stomach. I'd rather keep clear of the whole pack."

She had an answer at the tip of her tongue, but prudently suppressed it. It had occurred to her that a composite portrait of the pack, as envisaged by Tom, would very likely bear a striking likeness to Molly's brother. It was a sobering thought, and it was with a sober mien that she moved to his side and laid her cheek against his.

"You don't realize how much I love you," she said slowly. "Even yet."

"Ah, yes I do," he replied, taking her in his arms. "But you don't realize what you mean to me. I — but I can't *tell* you what I feel."

Next day they followed the ever narrowing Sound, passed finally a smoke-hazed city, which Tom said was Bridgeport, and, a few miles farther, rounded

a little island into a little bay and dropped anchor. Beyond a sea wall and a stretch of turf shaded by elms she saw a low white dwelling with a pillared portico and rambling wings.

"That's our shack," said Tom. "Doesn't look much like Newport, eh?"

"It looks like a home."

"Tell that to father," he laughed. "He says it's the only real one we've ever owned."

She better understood this feeling when she passed indoors. The house did not dwarf one like the place in Sixty-fourth Street, and it was nowhere flamboyant in its luxury. Tapestries and period rooms there were none. The chintz-covered chairs were meant for use, and nothing was too choice or costly to brook the free passage of light and air. Everything bespoke a blessed respite from the yoke of formality and fad, and Mrs. Ballantine, chameleon that she was, reflected her simpler background. She could not have been more unaffectedly kind. She seemed as sincere in her welcome as Roger himself.

Tom led his wife to the rooms they were to share — bright, chintz-hung rooms like those below — and bade her look from a window; and she saw a tangle of climbing roses, a garden of foxglove and larkspur, greensward sloping to the little bay and, beyond the bay with its white yacht, the Sound and a group of lazy sails etched against the violet shore of Long Island. Then her glance swept inland and rested on the yacht which had borne her to this haven.

"I've another name for the *Pastime*," she said.

"Have you, dear?"

"Yes — a name for us alone. It's *Happiness*. Whatever comes, I shall have those days to remember."

"Whatever comes?" He tilted her chin and questioned her eyes. "You speak as if you were afraid you'd left happiness out there on the boat. We're not going to drop into the jogtrot ways of other married people. It will always be honeymoon with us."

"If it only might!"

"It will. I'll never love you less than now. I shall love you more and more. It's so already. Every day you mean more to me than the day before."

"And will you tell me so sometimes? I adore it."

"All the time," he promised recklessly.

"Are you sure you care more every day?"

"Positive. I've noticed it right along."

"It hasn't been so long." ¶

"Since our real marriage, no; but in less than three months we'll be celebrating our first anniversary."

"Why, so we shall!" she cried, her eyes lighting.

"How strange it seems!"

They pondered its strangeness, and he declared that to celebrate properly they must borrow the *Pastime* for another cruise. But meanwhile the yacht should not lie idle at her moorings. He sketched trips round the Sound. The future beckoned in an endless holiday.

She lay in his arms and seemed to listen, but her thoughts strayed apart from his. Home at last, her heart went seeking him who was homeless. Paradise itself would fall short of perfection without Daddy Joe. She had been unable to send him even a line

since leaving Boston. Tom had been more constant than her shadow. But now she would make amends. And she would plan a way to hear from him in return, to see him whenever he came near.

Tom called her back with a kiss.

"Day-dreaming again! I've asked you twice if you'd like to learn to drive my roadster?"

Left to herself, she noticed that her wedding chest, which she had had shipped here from the school, had been unboxed and placed in her bedroom. The first sight of it saddened her, but presently the latter-day name, which her mother would doubtless have thought unmaidenly, sprang to mind and she smiled. It should be the hope chest henceforward.

On the morrow, which was Sunday, Roger Balantine followed her to the lawn and walked with her under the elms. Tom was strumming a piano indoors and snatches of college songs of the gayer sort drifted out to them. One chorus was a marked favorite with the performer, and when he returned to it for the third time his father gave it a close hearing.

"And what does our 'jolly good fellow' propose to do?" he queried abruptly. "What's his aim in life? Do you know, Sheila?"

"No," she replied.

"Hasn't he talked it over with you at all?"

"He mentioned it one night at Bar Harbor."

"Merely in a general way?"

"Yes. He said he must think seriously about it this summer."

"This summer! Hasn't he done any serious thinking these four years past?"

"Could he have graduated from Harvard if he hadn't?"

Roger glanced down at her with a half smile.

"Your husband is also my boy," he reminded, "and between us we're going to make that boy a man."

"You can't say that he isn't manly."

"And you can't say that such a reply is not beside the question. You are letting your heart fool your head, which is only a shade above letting your head fool your heart. Don't do either. Make them co-partners. It's quite possible even for a bride. Now it must be clear to you by this time that I think you are the right wife for Tom. I thought so almost from the first talk I had with you. Don't slump into an ordinary girl and disappoint me."

"What is it you expect of me?" she asked.

"Your help. First of all, don't pity Tom when I set him to work."

"I won't," she agreed.

"In the second place, take an interest in the work I give him to do. If he wants to talk about it when he comes home at night, let him."

"I don't need to promise that," she said. "What else?"

"I think I've mapped out enough to fill your summer evenings and week-ends. The factory is going to be some change from Harvard, and the growing pains may be severe." He bit the end from a cigar and reflected. "Of course," he added, "I don't expect Tom to support a wife on what he'll earn — not yet awhile. Your allowance will go on as before, Sheila, and if at any time it isn't enough for your

personal needs, speak up. My home will be yours as long as it suits you two to live in it, and I trust that will be as long as I live. I believe that's about all I meant to say. You might send Tom to me when he gets those ditties thoroughly out of his system."

Her tactful ministrations began that evening, and in the morning the 7:43 acquired a new commuter.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

BUT Tom, though amply encouraged, said little of the tasks set him and nothing whatever of his salary. He reached the Sasquatuck station daily on the 5:19 and, redolent of melted chocolate, jumped into the waiting car and whirled away to a near-by beach where the bathing was better than off their own shore. A plunge with her in the Sound gave a fillip to his spirits and his appetite, but he grew drowsy soon after dinner, as commuters will, and retired early so that he might feel less like a somnambulist on his dash for the 7:43.

On his first half-holiday he initiated her into the mysteries of the roadster and Sunday watched over her timid experiments with Connecticut's curves. Midway in the week she quite lost her awe of the machine and boldly met his train. It gave her a thrilling sense of power and freedom. She exulted in secret, however. Tom looked as if he thought her almost too apt a pupil and, himself taking the wheel, questioned her as to her ramblings with the car and was rather put out when she could not retrace them in detail.

"But how can I remember with all these levers and buttons on my mind?" she laughed. "Must I keep a log like the yacht's?"

The suggestion did not strike him as humorous.

"I like to hear everything you do," he said. "I want to keep in touch with your days even if I can't share them."

"Why don't you tell me more about your own days, Tom?"

"Mine! They're all alike between 7:43 and 5:19. Let's forget the factory. Have any of the neighbors called?"

By neighbors he meant the handful of rich summer colonists who owned the lion's share of the desirable water front. From the shore point of view, the village a mile or more up the little tidal river was chiefly inhabited by "natives" whose function was to assess taxes and charge high prices for indifferent supplies. Aside from Roger, who sometimes amused himself by witnessing that favorite indoor sport of New England, the town meeting, none of the household troubled with Sasquatuck's microscopic affairs. Mrs. Ballantine felt that she did her whole duty to the community by belonging to the golf club and sending an annual dole to the village fair. She graced neither with her presence.

To Sheila, airing the roadster, the place looked rather interesting. There was a plethora of saloons and graveyards, and she would have had a benevolent despot apply a torch to certain shabby buildings along the docks and dynamite the new town hall; but she liked the trees, the gardens, the lawns, the older cottages, and a white meeting-house on a hill, and gave her full approval to a team of oxen and the valley view. At a garage where she halted for gasolene a youth told her that several painters lived

roundabout and thoughtfully explained that they were not the kind who did houses and signs. This seemed to justify her good opinion of Sasquatuck. If artists chose to live here, it must have beauties unperceived by the shore dwellers.

She had not time to form an opinion of any of their neighbors, however, before, without warning, Ethel Hoyt arrived from California and charged the whole atmosphere with her nervous unrest. She appeared to crave excitement and threw herself desperately into one after another of the mild diversions of the countryside. Out of Roger's hearing she denounced Sasquatuck as a dull hole, and Mrs. Ballantine, swayed as always by her views, agreed that it was a dull hole and sighed for an estate in the Berkshires or Long Island. To Sheila she was honey-mouthed, but did not seek her society and as a rule avoided talking with her alone. It was when Tom was present that she became her friendliest, and both he and Sheila were often conscious of her watchful eye.

"She's getting on my nerves," he complained one night shortly after her coming. "I wish she'd take less interest in our affairs. What's her game, anyhow?"

"Has she always a game?"

"Oh, I don't mean that in a sinister sense," he disclaimed. "Ethel is all right in her way. But I hate to feel that she has her eyes glued on us every time we're together. I wish she'd get married."

"Perhaps she will when she decides that your marriage is a success."

Tom colored brightly.

"Do forget that delusion of mother's that I was sweet on Ethel," he said. "It's all moonshine."

"I'm not so silly as to care if you were."

"I'd care if you had been in love before you met me. I'd want to shoot the pup."

Sheila smiled.

"He wouldn't have been a pup," she returned. "But don't worry. I never was."

"Nor was I — seriously, that is."

"Not even when you called Ethel your Gypsy Queen?"

"Wh — what?"

"She was kind enough to show me that inscribed photograph last winter."

"The cat! What did you do?"

"I admired it."

"Bully for you! The nerve of her to throw such a bluff! It was only a bit of nonsense after a costume dance when I was Don José to her Carmen. I've hardly thought of it since. As for meaning anything by it — Holy Mackerel! I'd as soon think of falling in love with the goody who looked after my college rooms."

Sheila laughed outright. She had seen the goody. Tom laughed also, but with less abandonment and presently told her that she needed a change from Ethel and Sasquatuck.

"If it's cool to-morrow," he suggested, "meet me in town, and we'll dine together and go to the Follies."

She became suddenly radiant.

"Cool or not, I'll come," she said.

But it was of a humbler fun-maker than the Follies she was thinking the next afternoon when she reached

the terminal, and her first act was to hurry to a newsstand. This time the theatrical papers were silent as to her father's whereabouts, and she stood in sharp disappointment, wondering what it meant. He played in summer if engagements were to be had. Was he resting in spite of himself? Worried? In need? It was cruel not to know the truth. Then she bethought her of his agency and flew to the telephone booths.

It was a simple matter to get the ear of the agency, but quite another to extract news of Lew Pam. A languid feminine voice instructed her that it was contrary to office rules to furnish addresses; a letter would be forwarded.

"But I am his daughter," Sheila explained.

There was a skeptical pause.

"Maybe," drawled the voice. "But rules are rules. Send along your letter. He'll get it all right."

"Let me speak to the management," said Sheila.

"This is important."

"Hold the wire."

She held it till she grew faint in the ovenlike booth. Then the weary voice announced, "Mr. Gumpel says we can't make an exception," and broke the connection.

Sheila felt as if the last thread binding her to her father had snapped. She let herself out of the stifling box, paid the charge at the desk, walked slowly across the great central hall, and dragged up an incline to the street. Then her brain shook off its torpor, and she boarded a crosstown car. She had resolved to appeal to the inflexible Gumpel in person.

The agency waiting room was peopled with a

handful of actors out of work, a prematurely aged office boy, and the autocrat of the switchboard. Sheila went straight to the operator.

"I am Mr. Pam's daughter, as I told you," she said, "and I wish to see Mr. Gumpel himself."

The telephone girl was visibly impressed by her beauty, clothes, and persistence.

"We have to stall off a bunch of four-flushers, believe me," she confided apologetically. "Sit down a minute, and I'll go myself and explain."

One of the younger and more fashionable males offered his chair with a flourish, and the other men, old and young, adjusted their neckties and gazed their admiration. The women, scenting business rivalry, sat coldly critical. She thought them all pathetic. Then the operator beckoned from the inner door and, under a fire of hostile glances from both sexes, Sheila took precedence over all and passed to the throne room of authority.

He was not of royal look or bearing. Grossly fat, he lolled back in a swivel chair and inventoried her from head to heel over an obese cigar which he did not once remove from his mouth.

"So you're Lew Pam's girl?" he said, waving her to a seat.

"I am his daughter."

"How's it come you don't know his address?"

"He has not written lately," she replied and, with sudden inspiration, added: "I haven't had a word of any sort since he played in Providence the last week in June."

Mr. Gumpel slanted his cigar heavenward and reflected.

"Pam has never opened his head about you," he said. "For all I know, you may be a new kind of process server or bill collector."

"Do I look it?"

"I don't go by looks," he retorted. "I have to be shown. What's Lew's real moniker?"

"His what?"

"His real name? Don't you understand English?"

"Joseph Moore," she said.

Mr. Gumpel's cigar impeded, but did not thwart a friendly smile.

"I guess it's O.K.," he decided. "Lew doesn't chuck that information round promiscuous. Glad to meet you, Miss Moore." He extended a puffy caricature of a hand. "Tell your father for me that he's making the mistake of his life in not slipping you among the Rosebuds. You're a pippin for looks, and if you've got talent too, I might do something for you myself."

"Thank you," she said, loathing his touch. "Where is he?"

"Up among the nutmegs — Bridgeport, Connecticut."

"Bridgeport!"

"Yes." The fat man pencilled the full address on a card. "He was feeling all in when he filled his date there and laid off for a rest."

Sheila leaped to her feet.

"Do you mean he's sick — really sick?"

Mr. Gumpel lumbered erect, laid the card in her palm, and with his cushiony right hand pressed hers tenderly into his cushiony left.

"Just a touch of summer grip, I guess. I wouldn't

worry, girlie." He ushered her affectionately to the public corridor by a private door. "Ring me up when you're in town again, and we'll have a bite of lunch together. If you don't fancy vaudeville, it'd be a cinch to work you into the movies. You've got Mary Pickford beaten a mile."

Again in the street, she caught sight of a clock and perceived that it was already time for her to join Tom. How could she smile on him through a long dinner and then, for other hours, feign an interest in the play? But Tom seemed to find her quiet mood to his taste. He had had a damnable day, he said, and in manner quite the tired business man of legend revived only when the fairest of the Follies invited inspection of their widely heralded and frankly exposed charms. Like true commuters they left before the performance ended and, thanks to a taxi-driver of suicidal bent, made their train with thirty seconds to spare. The coach was very warm, and Sheila's tired business man was now genuinely fagged, but before he fell asleep he assured her that none of the beauteous Follies could be mentioned in the same day with herself. It was a sincere and loving tribute, but she was forcibly reminded of Mr. Gumpel. Then her anxiety thrust them both from her thoughts.

She believed that her father was seriously ill and begrudged the hours which must lapse before she could fly to him. Now that she had learned to drive the roadster, a secret visit ought to be easy to manage. She would start as soon as Tom left for the city, cover the few miles, and return before any one gave a thought to her absence.

But this plan, so simple in theory, proved complex in fact. Tom rose too late for his usual train and, during the extra half hour he spent at the house Ethel sauntered downstairs and by some impish impulse displayed a marked desire for Sheila's company.

"Let's have a game of tennis," she suggested.

"Too warm," said Sheila promptly.

"Then a swim. The tide will be right in an hour or so."

"If you go in this morning, you won't feel like a dip to-night with me," Tom pointed out. "But suit yourself, dear."

"I'll wait for you."

Ethel eyed her with a tantalizing smile.

"Then I'll motor with you. You see I'm nothing if not agreeable."

"Sheila is going to run me over to the station now," said Tom, glancing at his watch. "Sorry there are only two seats."

"I've known them to hold three," she returned, continuing to smile. "But I'm not hinting anything so tactless to-day. Sheila can pick me up here after the parting."

Tom threw off the brakes with superfluous energy.

"If a husband doesn't turn up for her soon, I'll advertise," he snapped, as they sped down the drive. "She's getting to be a public nuisance."

Sheila was deep in her own thoughts.

"I shan't take her out, Tom," she declared. "She only suggested it to be annoying."

"Don't I know! But like as not she'll have changed her fool mind by the time you get back

to the house. Better act willing and keep the peace."

"I can't do it."

"On your nerves, too, isn't she? But we'll have to grin and bear it. With her, dishonesty's the best policy."

"I can't do it," she repeated. "Not to-day, Tom."

"Oh, well," he rejoined, "put up the car and tell her I think it's too hot. I do think so. It's just the weather for tire trouble. That's the best solution."

It was no solution for Sheila, and she stood staring down the rails till his train vanished. She saw Ethel with the eyes of her sex. Whether Tom ever cared for her or not, she had loved and perhaps still loved him. This was the tragic source of her restlessness. That she could feel anything but dislike for his wife was unthinkable. Her friendship was a sham, her enmity real. The prudent course would be to return for her as Tom had first suggested. But what if she persisted in her caprice? Would there come a second chance to-day to steal away?

Then, stronger than her dread of Ethel's power for mischief, welled her forebodings for Daddy Joe.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

IF she startled her father by her sudden call, he on his part dumfounded her. She had pictured him bedridden in some desolate hotel, dependent on bell-boys and chambermaids for his poor comforts, lonely, broken, in the depths. But the address which Mr. Gumpel had scrawled on her card proved to be a quiet boarding house in a quiet street, with flowers in its dooryard and trees in its side lawn. And under the trees were wicker chairs and a hammock, and lounging in the hammock, chatting — yes, laughing — with other men, was Daddy Joe.

They stared at each other across the intervening sidewalk and turf, and then, with a step not at all feeble, he hurried to the curb.

“You’re not sick!”

“Have you lost your senses?” he retorted. “First thing you know you’ll spill the beans for good.”

Her face fell.

“Aren’t you glad to see me?”

“Not like this.”

“Oh, don’t be angry,” she pleaded. “I was so worried. You’ll see why when I tell you —”

“Don’t tell me anything here,” he interrupted. “Those rubbernecks on the grass have seen too much

already. Drive round the block. I'll walk the other way and meet you."

She thought the precaution needless, but obeyed and came upon him waiting in the shade of a hedge. This time he smiled and kissed her as she leaned to him from the car.

"I was pretty short with you back there," he owned, "but I couldn't think of anything except the chance you're taking."

"Do get in," she said. "We'll go out in the country."

"No, we won't," he replied. "We'll talk here and talk fast. What did you hear that worried you?"

She described her call at the agency.

"You didn't give yourself away — your married name?" broke in Joe.

"I said only that you were my father."

"I'm sorry you said that much. That fathead might run into you some time when you're with your husband and blab all he knows. You can't be too careful, Sheila."

"I felt sure you needed me."

"It was a wrong hunch."

"But you looked badly at Christmas, and when I heard that you were ill enough to stop work, I had to see for myself."

"And you see I'm all right, don't you?"

"Are you?" she asked doubtfully.

"Full of pep as a colt. I was a bit run down when I struck Bridgeport, but it was nothing — just tonsillitis — and gave me a handy excuse to knock off for a while and try out the movies."

"You've found an opening!" she exclaimed.

"Not such a whale of an opening, but it may widen out. Anyhow, I'm going down to the city to-morrow or next day and look into it. I'll make good or bust my braces. So you see there's nothing under the sun to worry over. Don't ever worry on my account, honey. Promise me that you won't take a chance like this again?"

"Will you agree to let me know if you ever do need me?"

"Yes. I'll slip you word somehow."

"Then I promise," she said.

He regarded her with deep content.

"After all," he added, "I'm glad you came. One square look in your eyes has told me more than letters ever could. I know he's been good to you."

"Yes," she responded. "I didn't make a mistake."

"And neither did I," said Joe. "Packing you off to Roger Ballantine was the best job I ever did. It was such a big idea I wonder how I had the gumption to think of it." He kissed her and held her a moment longer with his gaze. "Give Tom's father some of your spare time, Sheila. He'll like it—same as I would."

"He'll never be to me what you are," she returned quickly. "There's only one Daddy Joe."

He gave her hand a final pat.

"Put him next in line," he said. "He's shown that he's the real goods."

No such sense of utter desolation as had marked their midwinter parting oppressed her now. It was an enormous relief to have found him up and about, and this time his optimism had had a ring which

sent her hopes bounding ahead of his. The new work would prove his salvation. Other men were making fortunes in moving pictures, and so would her father. He was too clever to fail. And with money — riches — the key to every door, the day would surely come when they could be altogether happy.

The Post Road was busier than on her eastward trip and her homeward journey slow. Far from confident in her driving yet, she gave each approaching vehicle more than its half of the central asphalt, and one of these digressions on the side of safety had its sequel in a small explosion and a hiss of escaping air. Tom had prophesied aright. The distance to the next public garage was not great, but other motorists were before her, and the tire was changed only after a long and maddening delay. It was noon when she passed through Sasquatuck village and a quarter after when she reached the house.

Ethel was not at luncheon, but Mrs. Ballantine shed abundant light on her absence.

"The Tracy girls — they're a very good family — stopped by for Ethel," she let fall during the meal. "She was doubtful about going, for she said that she had promised to motor with you. She is most careful in such matters, as, of course, all of us should be."

"The ride was her own suggestion," said Sheila.

"Then I'm the more sorry you did not keep the engagement," rejoined her mother-in-law. "I am very anxious to have Ethel feel that our home is still hers. But perhaps you were merely thoughtless and did not mean to slight her?"

Sheila took the easiest way out.

"I certainly didn't mean to be gone so long," she said. "I had my first puncture."

The mechanics of motoring interested Mrs. Ballantine no more than the mysteries of her plumbing, and Sheila escaped further explanations or rebuke. The puncture now wore the look of a blessing in disguise, and when Ethel came back she again made use of it and again found it adequate. Ethel was even less avid for details than Mrs. Ballantine and betrayed neither rancor at her neglect nor need of assurance that this was still her home. There remained only Tom to mollify. One more resort to the heaven-sent puncture, and the rash adventure would be buried in oblivion. But Tom, exhausted by his daily bout with the chocolate industry, forgot to ask the issue of their morning discussion. All was well with the world.

Till near the end of dinner. Whereupon, Ethel began to favor them with details of her outing with the Tracys. They had lunched at some country club of greater pretensions than Sasquatuck's and chanced on certain New Canaanites whom Mrs. Ballantine held in high esteem. But this was a mere preliminary, a casual approach to her account of the discomforts which had beset their transit through booming Bridgeport. Then, ready for her climax, she beamed warmly on Sheila.

"We passed you," she said.

Sheila glowed guiltily.

"Really?"

"Just on the outskirts of the city. Was that before or after your puncture?"

"Before."

Mrs. Ballantine fixed her daughter-in-law with a stare of pained surprise.

"But I thought it was merely the puncture that delayed you," she said.

"No," answered Sheila. "After I left Tom I decided to take a little run by myself."

"A *little* run!"

"It did not seem far to me."

Roger came to her rescue.

"The Post Road is rather a handful for a green driver," he commented. "I'd stick to the by-roads for a while, Sheila, if I were you."

"I shall hereafter," she replied.

Tom said nothing, but she sensed his bewildered disapproval. Ethel, her bolt shot, finished her dessert in a demure silence. The one topic which did not droop as soon as broached was the war.

She did not wait for Tom to take her to task.

"I know exactly what you think," she said, the moment they were alone. "You think I went out of my way to be rude to Ethel, and misled your mother and defied you. But at the same time please bear in mind that that detestable girl only proposed a drive to annoy me, that she didn't care whether I came back for her or not, and that she saved up her spiteful bit of news till she could tell it when it would embarrass me most."

Tom freed himself with a directness worthy of his sire.

"Granted," he said. "But why Bridgeport?"

"The road was clear this morning. Going over I met hardly any one."

"Did you drive into the city?"

"Not far."

"As far as the shopping district?"

"Oh, no. I didn't go there to shop."

"Or for any special reason?"

"What reason could I have?"

"That's what I'm trying to find out. I appreciate that Ethel rubbed you the wrong way — she did me; but to fly off in that fashion — I don't know what to call it."

"Call it a whim. You mustn't expect me to act sensibly all the time, dear. And, after all, I didn't smash the roadster."

"I'm not concerned for the roadster."

"Or come to any harm myself. But I won't worry you this way again, Tom. I promise. And, if you wish me to, I'll try to like Ethel. I suppose you see her through rose-colored glasses, fond of her as you were —"

"Don't begin that again," he protested with a wry face. "I've explained about her till I'm sick."

Sheila could smile again.

"Explanations are a bore, aren't they? But I really wish you'd point out her good qualities. It might do me good to remember them when her other sort rouse my sinful nature. What are they?"

"Ask mother," he said tersely. "She's the authority."

The thin ice was safely passed. It had sagged and cracked ominously, however, and the narrowness of her escape gave Sheila wakeful hours long after Tom slept. The radiant hopes of the morning were dimmed. What earnest had she that other fears

and other risks would not thronq the future? To what a purgatory had that unselfish dreamer her father committed her! Even if her secret had been shameful, a cardinal sin, she could hardly pay a higher price for happiness.

She woke heavy-hearted, and the forenoon, after Tom had gone, brought nothing to raise her spirits. Ethel held herself aloof, and Mrs. Ballantine, still displeased, copied Ethel. Toward midday they set off together on some excursion of uncertain goal to which she was not bidden, and she lunched alone. She brought a book to table, but she could fix her mind on its pages neither then nor later, when she wandered out of doors. A little before two o'clock Roger came home and, perhaps in pity for her loneliness, suggested blackfishing.

"Put on a rough skirt and shoes that are shoes," he directed. "Bait-hunting is half the fun."

They embarked in the *Pastime's* launch for the salt meadows down the bay, and for half an hour she forgot herself in the quest of the nimble fiddler crab. Then, with at least a quart of these unfortunates which it was her duty to keep within bounds, they steered round the little island and anchored over a bar where, tide and bait suiting their humor, blackfish were known to lurk and bite.

Roger prepared their double-hooked lines and, while Sheila shut her eyes, impaled four of the doomed crabs and cast them to the sacrifice. Almost instantly there was a tug at her fingers and, drawing in the line, she found both hooks bare. The blackfish were at home and hungry. More fiddlers fulfilled their destiny — an orchestra of fiddlers — and

Sheila, harrowed by this slaughter of the innocents, began to wonder why people thought wholesale murder sport. Then, with a leap of the heart, she made her first catch and wondered no longer.

She was astounded when Roger told her that it was past five o'clock.

"How can it be!" she cried, and then, blankly: "Tom's train!"

"No matter," he laughed. "Reeves has gone for him by now. I 'phoned the garage before we left the house."

"You think of everything," she said.

"Not quite. But it was a dead certainty you'd lose track of time once the real fishing began. Do you like it well enough to come again?"

"Whenever you'll take me."

He slowly wound his line.

"You and I seem just naturally cut out for pals," he said.

They raised the anchor and glided homeward to the cheerful put-put of the motor. Not an evening of the summer had been so serene. A fleet of gossamer clouds hung becalmed in the eastern sky. The brazen surface of the Sound was motionless. The elms and shrubbery round the long white dwelling were as still as the greenery of a painted scene. Then, as incongruous as a brawling outcry in a cathedral, the russet figure of the head gardener tore down the lawn to the water's edge and tossed his arms and mouthed at them unintelligibly.

"Did he say 'drunk'?" asked Roger. "It looks it."

"I thought the word was 'wreck'," said Sheila.

They drew nearer the shore and caught another word — “train” — and then, quite clearly “wrecked at Sasquatuck.”

Ballantine swayed to his feet and made a megaphone of his hands.

“What train?”

And the gardener bethought himself to cup his hands and with ghastly distinctness shouted:

“The 5:19!”

Roger sank back, his face ashen, and sat like a stone till the boat grazed the landing. Then in a single leap he reached the man and shook him.

“Out with it!” he commanded. “Is he — what have you heard?”

The gardener’s tale was soon told. He had been working near the highway when a farmer raced by and flung him the news. Roger left him stuttering the grisly details of the rumor and ran for the garage, with Sheila panting at heel. Not a chauffeur was in the place. The touring car had gone as ordered to the station, the limousine which Mrs. Ballantine had taken was still absent. But the roadster stood ready, and they hurled themselves into it and shot wildly down the drive.

Sheila had not spoken since she sprang ashore, and no word passed her lips now. But she suffered as she had not conceived it would ever fall to her to suffer, and she realized as she had never realized how deep in her being lay the roots of her love. If Tom — but even in thought she shuddered back from an admission that he might be dead. He was safe — safe — safe! The phrase beat in her brain in desperate iteration.

Then, where the road forked, they sighted the high embankment of the railway and the grim tokens of catastrophe — a pillar of steam shot by lurid flames, the black hulk of the shattered engine with blazing Pullmans piled crazily against it, distraught human beings toiling at awful tasks . . .

“Thank God!” cried Roger. “Thank God!”

He brought the roadster to a sudden halt and dropped his head in his hands. Sheila thought him mad. Why should he thank God? What had God to do with such a horror?

“That train was westbound,” he said with a deep sob. “It wasn’t Tom’s — it wasn’t Tom’s!”

Delivered from torture, they clung weakly together. Then with a broken “And I thought I was a man!” he straightened and climbed heavily from the car. In another moment they had joined the throng swarming over the embankment and from a mass of unfamiliar faces singled out the face they had feared never to see alive.

Tom took their embraces stolidly. He seemed to grasp neither their anxiety nor their relief. Stunned by what he had beheld, he could not explain where he had left his own train or how he came where he was.

“Those girls,” he said thickly. “Nobody could get near them. The flames — the flames —”

His father spoke with a bystander who vehemently denounced the water system. The firemen were powerless. The old story: no pressure. The dead were there. Beyond were the badly injured tended by the doctors. He praised the doctors as hysterically as he had scored the water system. They had come

from all the countryside, all the towns for miles. And ambulances. The gong of a speeding ambulance bore him witness.

People surged round them, and they struggled from the press and so came near the place set apart for the maimed and helpless. A man in a faded gray suit lay at the end of the row, and the sight of that faded gray suit stopped Sheila's breath. Then, under her eyes, the man drew up his arm in a feeble effort to screen his face. But she saw his face and with an agonized "Daddy Joe!" flung Tom from her path.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

His eyes reproached her.

"Lew Pam," he warned in a whisper. "Don't forget!" Then, as the others came, his gaze questioned Roger Ballantine's an instant and passed to the son. "Queer how folks meet," he said, with a twisted smile. "I used to know her—" and lapsed into unconsciousness.

Sheila threw herself beside him in the dust.

"He's dead!" she moaned. "My father—my own Daddy Joe!"

Her collapse woke Tom from his trance. He became a man of action and decision.

"Steady, Sheila! It's only a faint. Loosen his collar. Help me chafe his wrists. Father, get hold of one of those doctors."

And Roger, deposed from lifelong authority, with a gleam in his eyes hurried to obey. He waylaid a man with a black bag who had just left another victim, and the physician forced a stimulant between Joe's lips and worked over him till his eyelids stirred.

"You know him?" he asked, looking up at Roger.

"Yes. I want him taken to my home. It's close by."

The doctor shook his head.

"It's a hospital case," he said. "I'll get him off soon."

Sheila lifted her white face to Tom's.

"I'm going with him — I must."

"We'll follow the ambulance," he said and to his father: "How did you come?"

"In the roadster. But Reeves is here somewhere with the big car."

"Find him," ordered Tom and turned again to his wife.

To Sheila, clinging to Daddy Joe's irresponsible fingers, it seemed ages beyond reckoning before the stretcher came, and then yet other ages while they trailed the clanging ambulance through the twilight. Tom was at the wheel, she with Roger in the rear.

"He's my father," she said, as if she had not already avowed it in word and deed. "I tried to tell you —"

"Yes," he said gently. "In Boston. But I knew long ago. Let's not speak of it now." He put his arm round her shoulders and so held her till country lost itself in town, and they climbed the last steep hill to the hospital.

The stretcher and its burden had vanished. They crossed a hall saturated with the odor of ether and entered a waiting room as cheerless as most waiting rooms which have to do with the relief of human ills. Roger took in its dreariness, paced for an interval between hearth and windows, and abruptly went out. Sheila, tense and still, sat with her gaze riveted on the door of fate. Beside her, so close that a fold of her skirt brushed his knee, was Tom, with his hand locked in hers. Dimly, through her torturing suspense, it came to her that this day had freed her from duplicity. She need contrive and pretend no longer. They knew.

Then, as distinctly as if they had just fallen from his lips, she recalled Roger Ballantine's words. He had known in Boston — known and stopped her confession. He had come by the truth himself. Long ago! And yet he had gone on befriending her, shielded her with his sympathy, taken her to his great heart. And now Tom knew also, and it made no difference. They were united as they had never been.

There was a step outside. She staggered to her feet and rigidly waited. But it was Roger who entered. Somehow he had got hold of coffee for them both. He stood over them while they drank it, watched them as if they were children, made them drain it to the last drop.

"How kind you are!" she cried, seizing his hand. "All of your kindnesses have shamed me. I wanted to pay in the only way I could. I meant to give Tom up. But I was such a coward I couldn't do it. I've been weak, selfish, accepted everything, given nothing —"

"Sheila!" he interposed sternly. "Pull yourself together. You've been through too much to see things straight. We all have."

"But I want you to know that I'm the one to blame — not my father. He thought only of me — wanted to drop out of my life. I'm the one to blame. And I'm being punished. I let you think he was dead, and now, like a judgment — oh, I'm afraid, afraid —"

The door opened briskly, and there entered a white-clad young interne. She wavered toward him, her lips moving soundlessly.

"Mr. Moore's friends?" he asked, with a smile.

"He'll live!" she gasped.

"My dear young lady! Of course he'll live. He has a broken leg and is badly bruised, but we've found no internal injuries — none whatever. Don't distress yourself. I think I can promise to let you see him for a few minutes to-morrow."

The dapper interne and the wall behind him swam. She reeled back into Tom's arms, and turning blindly, wept against his breast.

"I'm so thankful — *so* thankful!"

He led her to the car and sat with her while Roger delayed indoors to question the doctor. Once more she felt that out of this crucible had come their true and perfect union.

"I'm so thankful," she said again with a deep sigh. "First it was you I thought I'd lost, then my father — and all in a few hours."

"Try not to think of it," he urged. "We must both try. It's all too ghastly to dwell upon." A shudder ran through him. "That wreck!"

Released from its benumbing terror, her mind groped back to externals. A street light filtering wanly through foliage revealed again the drawn pallor of his face, his ruined clothing. He too had passed through flames, real flames.

"Oh, forgive me," she begged. "I've been blind to everything but my own trouble. You were there in it all — that awful misery. You helped."

"I did what I could," he said. "It wasn't much. The fire kept us back. God! but it was horrible to see — to hear —"

She credited him with heroic deeds. He had risen to

the test, shown himself truly fine. Not even Roger had been more the man. Not even Roger had been more tender in her supreme need. She exalted and adored him. He could ask nothing she would not grant. Her whole life should be an expiation. She burned to pour out her heart, to humble herself, be his slave.

"I want to tell you all," she said. "I want to clear away everything that has stood between us and made you doubt me. I must get rid of it now and forever."

"Not to-night," he protested. "Let yourself down, Sheila. Put all this from your thoughts."

"How can I put it from my thoughts till you know everything, and I know that you forgive?"

"Don't speak of forgiveness. I love you. We'll be needing a doctor for you if you won't relax. Don't excite yourself now with what's past, dear. We'll talk it over in the morning."

"I can't wait," she said. "Don't ask me to, Tom. I've longed so for this time to come. I haven't had a moment's real peace, a moment's real happiness."

He made no further attempt to dissuade her, and she began to tell him of her mother; of the nomadic life she had led against her instincts; her dislike for her husband's work; her insistence that Lew Pam remain a self apart from all that stood to them for a home.

"You must know this, Tom, to understand what he felt when he heard that I was married. I wanted you to meet each other then. If you only had! But he meant me to have my chance, he said. He did not consider himself. He never has. Even to-day — as he lay there helpless — his first thought was of me."

Roger came unheeded down the steps, crossed the turf, and peered into the tonneau.

"Sit where you are, Tom," he said. "I'll drive home."

Sheila turned in impassioned earnestness.

"Not yet," she entreated. "I'm telling him the truth. And I want you to hear too."

"Now?" He searched both their faces.

"Yes, now. I want to be done with deception. I've despised myself for deceiving you."

"But you haven't deceived me, my girl," he replied quietly. "You can tell me nothing about your circumstances that I haven't known for months. If you were older, different than you are, a scheming woman, you would have seen that I must know. You'd have reasoned that I'd act as any sensible man in my place would act — check up your statements, leave no stone unturned to find out who and what you were."

"You never believed me?"

"I believed in you, which was more important. Your story was another affair. That a girl like you should of her own accord face the music as you did went against all I knew of human nature. I was sure that some one had made you do it, and it didn't take me long to discover who that some one was. I don't mean that I used detectives — my own brains were enough. I simply looked up the people you said had employed your father and traced him back to the stage. I heard nothing that wasn't to his credit. He had worked hard and lived clean. The only mystery was his attitude toward your marriage. He had to clear that up himself."

"You talked with him?"

"Yes. We got together Christmas Eve."

Sheila started.

"I saw him that day," she said. "I made him meet me. I begged him to let me speak out."

"So he told me. We talked for three or four hours. That's why I was late for the theater. We'd been sitting together in a Hoboken restaurant. That's when I learned all there was left to learn about you — the things I hadn't seen for myself and that Sophie Perrin hadn't seen. But I wasn't borrowing trouble on your account by then. It was Joe Moore I wanted to know, and before we separated I did know him and respect him as I respect few men. I've bumped against all sorts in my day, but nobody just like him. They say some of the Irish still believe in fairies, and I guess he's one of them. Anyhow, he saw you in a fairy tale and was ready to give all he had to give to make it come true. I didn't try to argue him out of it. I'd as soon shake a child's faith in Santa Claus. He wanted to do what he was doing for his wife's sake as much as yours, Sheila. And he wanted to go on doing it. I think he felt that Tom here mightn't take as broad a view of it as he would after you had lived together and found out what is worth while in life and what is not. Perhaps he was wrong. But, as I say, I didn't argue. I was as keen as he was to have you two settle down in double harness. It seemed best to leave the issue to time."

Tom stirred in his seat.

"I had a right to be told," he said in a strained voice. "I ought not to have been the only one kept in ignorance of the facts."

"You were not the only one," said his father. "Your mother knows nothing of all this. What was the use of mentioning it? Discussion wouldn't have mended matters. It would only have muddled them. You had your work to do. Sheila had hers. And, after all, the main thing to decide was whether you two were of the same mind in June that you were in September. I wanted you to be. I'd come to think that if you had scoured the country over, you couldn't have picked a wife better suited to you. But I wasn't quite sure of you both till the day we reached Boston. Then I was content to let well enough alone."

"I had a right to be told," repeated Tom, as if he had not listened. "It was unfair to leave me blundering in the dark."

Roger looked away over the dusky town and harbor.

"We're all blundering in the dark, son," he said slowly. "Be thankful that you've got company."

He took his place at the wheel, and they descended into the lower city, crossed the river, crested the last of Southwark's outflung hills, and struck into the road that led straight to the long white house on the little bay. Sheila gave herself up to the swaying car with the abandon of sheer exhaustion. It seemed to her that not only this day but all the days since her marriage were demanding toll of her body and mind. She could not even rouse herself with the thought that she had reached the end of double dealing. She felt that she had beggared her brain, spent the last ounce of her strength.

They sighted the lights of the house through the trees and wound the drive down which she and Roger had plunged with fear clutching at their heartstrings.

Waiting in the portico were Mrs. Ballantine and Ethel. They looked curious rather than genuinely concerned as they came down the steps in their cool summer finery, and the older woman began chattering before the car could halt.

"Isn't it appalling?" she demanded, in tones which were not appalled. "Right at our own door, too! We were up Litchfield way and knew nothing about it till we reached home. Fortunately Reeves got here first, and we were spared your fright over Tom. I should certainly discharge that gardener, Roger. It's dangerous to have such an ill-balanced creature on the place. He would have blurted out the same story to me if I had been here. But Reeves isn't much better in an emergency. His wits were all centered on the roadster — a bent mud-guard or some such silliness. He thought you knew a man in the wreck and had gone with him to a hospital, but it was all guesswork. He couldn't really tell us anything. Why didn't you telephone? I think you might have telephoned. Who was it that was hurt?"

Roger faced her with a penetrating gaze.

"One of the best men I've ever known," he said. "Sheila's father."

For a moment his wife's countenance reflected mere stupefaction. Then, as if impelled by another will than her own, she gathered the girl in her arms.

"You poor child!"

Sheila was child enough to melt at that mothering touch and to believe it prompted by the heart. She was moved even by a vague murmur of sympathy from Ethel, who stood by with her dark eyes strangely large and bright.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

It was long before the house grew quiet. Sheila, to please Roger, made a pretence of eating and went directly after to bed. Tom followed her upstairs, leaned over her pillow, kissed her and went out, leaving all doors open to such fitful air currents as stirred the sultry night. The least sounds carried in the stillness, and Sheila, staring into the darkness, read into each its meaning.

The family were talking it over. From the living room rose an indistinct hum of voices. Roger's voice predominated, but its deep undertones were pierced now and again by his wife's fretful queries and comment. Tom rarely spoke, and Ethel not at all. Yet Sheila was as sure that she was present as she was that the conversation had to do with herself. She saw her clearly, her eyes with their dark glitter, her thin-lipped smile. And, by and by, she identified her footfall, the rustle of her garments as she climbed the staircase and turned in at her room across the hall. She stood within her threshold an instant, as if still listening, and at a second rustle stealthily shut herself in. Then Tom's mother ascended, came down the corridor, hesitated at her own door, retraced her steps to Ethel's, tapped softly and, closeted with her

favorite, began a whispered conference which lasted till Roger Ballantine mounted the stairs. When he had passed, his wife stole after him and entered their suite by a different door.

There was now silence on the upper floor, but below faint noises betrayed Tom's unrest. He struck matches at intervals, changed from chair to chair, forsook the living room for the portico, paused a moment, and then abruptly crossed the gravel drive. Here his tread lost itself in the lawn and, springing from bed, she ran to a window and tried to trace him under the trees. But he had already merged with the shadows. His wanderings, like his thoughts, were a mystery.

She crept back to bed. The house was quiet at last. All under that roof save herself were asleep. They had put the turmoil of the day behind them. And so must she. But sleep still eluded her. She could relax her body, but the brain that bade her body rest was itself teeming with images which would not fade. They trooped without order or sequence, these images. One moment she was waiting at the hospital, another shrinking from the lurid tragedy of the wreck, the next listening to the murmuring, rustling house as it sat in judgment on her and hers. Then, when it seemed that only some blessed drug could bring relief, she fell into a heavy slumber and was conscious of nothing till the sun shot a burning ray through the blinds and smote her on the eyelids. She turned to avoid it, opened her eyes, and in an instant was wide awake. Tom's bed had not been touched.

But he had returned. She could hear him splashing in the bath. Presently he looked in and wished her

good morning. She asked no questions, but he volunteered that he had slept on the yacht.

"It was so infernally hot ashore," he added. "And, besides, I didn't want to disturb you."

She felt that his latter reason was an afterthought. Surely he knew that she would be the more disturbed by his absence. Was this the Tom who declared that they should never pass a night apart? His action had shattered something precious and irreparable. They were no longer wedded lovers. They had become like the humdrum millions they scorned, merely man and wife. She prayed for some word, some sign, that would prove her wrong, but Tom finished dressing in silence and went out before her. But, if yesterday had slain romance, it had spared that incorrigible romanticist, Daddy Joe. Her thoughts flew to him for comfort. There was no telephone in her rooms and, hurrying into her clothes, she ran to the instrument in the lower hall to find that Roger had forestalled her.

"Good news," he greeted her. "I just had his nurse on the wire, and she tells me that he got through the night far better than they expected. You can see him between eleven and twelve. Tom will run you over."

Tom, in a doorway, withdrew his eyes from the garden.

"I'm not going to business to-day, then?"

His father's face altered.

"Not if I know it. What kind of a firm do you think you're working for? You'll do what you can for Sheila."

"You don't need to put it as a command," said Tom.

They left the house before either Mrs. Ballantine or Ethel came down, but Sheila knew that Tom had seen his mother that morning and was no less certain that she had said things which increased his unrest. He was solicitous to help, but she missed the tenderness he had shown in the shadow of disaster. He was by her side because he felt that he ought to be there. It was his duty as her husband.

"I'll come in if you wish," he offered, as they reached the hospital. "But perhaps you'd rather go alone?"

"Much rather," she said.

She entered her father's room resolved at any cost to cheer him, but as always it was he who put heart in her. He had a smile for her from the first, made light of his sufferings, and cut short her questions with a chuckle.

"I've been laughing here by myself," he told her. "The nurse thought I was off my nut, I guess, but I didn't let her in on the joke. I was saving it for you, honey, and it's a scream. I'm insured!"

"Are you?" she said, more ready to weep than laugh. "How splendid, Daddy Joe!"

"Just by the skin of my teeth," he continued. "Off and on, I've carried accident insurance for twenty years, paid out a slew of money and never got back a red. If the policy was in force, nothing happened. If I let it slide, there was something doing straight off the bat. That's the way it was when I took sick in Bridgeport, and as soon as I could toddle out, I nailed down a new policy for a thousand. Talk about luck! Luck is my middle name. This loaf won't cost me a cent. In fact I stand to make by

it. And then there's the railroad company. That side of it slipped my mind at first, I was so tickled over getting even with the insurance crowd. Of course, the railroad will have to ante up. I shouldn't wonder if they had a lawyer camping on the doormat now. They have to step lively to get ahead of the ambulance chasers, you know. Maybe there's a bunch of shy-sters on the doormat too."

She smiled because she saw that he wished her to smile and was silent because it was plain he wished her merely to listen. Watching her face, he dilated on his good fortune, gave her such lighter news of the hospital as the bedridden glean, described his breakfast tray to the last meager detail, mimicked the brogue of the scrubwoman who cleaned his room and the paternal manner of the young interne she had met last night. The wreck went unmentioned. How he had escaped death, what he had endured and seen others endure, she could only conjecture. She herself might have been the invalid, so careful was he to shun the sinister and the depressing.

A nurse came to the door.

"Shucks!" he exclaimed. "You're not going to clamp down the lid?"

"Yes, Mr. Moore," she said and returned for a moment to the corridor.

"Out you go then, Sheila. She's the boss."

She laid her cheek against his.

"I must tell you something first, Daddy Joe — something you'll be glad to hear. Mr. Ballantine said that you were one of the best men he'd ever known."

"Roger Ballantine said that about me?"

"Yes — before them all."

"He's a prince," declared Joe huskily; "a regular prince." Then, turning her head: "What about Tom?" he asked. "How did he take things yesterday?"

"Nobody could have been more kind," she answered quickly. "And he brought me here this morning. He would have come in if I hadn't said that I wanted to see you alone."

His eyes held hers a moment longer.

"Tell him I'm sorry I butted in like this," he said. "Tell him I'll do a neat little vanishing act as soon as I'm able. He didn't count on me in the beginning, and he won't have to worry about me hereafter. Don't let there be any doubt on that point, Sheila. Make it plain to him right away."

She had neither the heart nor the opportunity to protest. The nurse came back and came to stay. The visit was over. Twenty-four hours must drag by before she could see him again. And then, facing once more those eyes which read her as did no other eyes, what could she say that she had not already said? She felt that he had divined her misgivings and, because he divined them, charged her with that message to Tom. And to-morrow he would study her face for his answer.

She went out into the brilliant midsummer noon. Tom had driven into the shade a few rods down the street. His back was toward her, but his attitude clearly showed his frame of mind. He was bent forward, elbows on knees and chin in hands, a figure of disillusion so rapt in his somber thoughts that he was unaware of her till she stood at his side.

"Was I long?"

"I don't know," he said and, resuming his rôle of the dutiful husband, handed her to her seat and perfunctorily asked: "How did you find him?"

"Looking far more cheerful than you, Tom."

He made no rejoinder and gave his full attention to the car till they quitted the town. Then, coming to open fields, he abruptly broke silence.

"I can't pretend to be anything I'm not," he stated with his eyes on the road ahead. "My talents don't run that way."

She stole a glance at his profile. It was as cold as his tone.

"I know I deserve that," she said. "But you were more generous last night — or seemed so — when I asked your forgiveness."

"I hadn't heard the whole truth — God only knows whether I've heard it yet. I didn't know that my own father had been in league to make a dupe of me."

"That's unjust."

"How can *you* use such a word?"

"Unjust to your father, I mean. Whatever you may think of my conduct, you must not misjudge his. You have been first in his thoughts."

"Have I? It strikes me that you have been number one."

"He's been my friend — the most wonderful friend a girl ever had. But back of it all was his love for you. Surely you see that?"

"I see that I've been treated shabbily. And I resent it. Any man who's a man and not a worm would resent it. But I don't care to talk about it

now. I want to think things over, find out where I stand."

"Very well," she said. "But I must give you a message. My father will never come into your life. He asked me to tell you this and that he is sorry you have had to hear of him at all."

"That doesn't alter the situation," he replied after a pause. "It isn't *his* motives I question."

Last night's return to the house had been hard enough to bear, but she dreaded to-day's more. If the intervening hours had only served to brim the cup of Tom's resentment, what charity could she expect from his mother? But Roger met her in the hall as if he had waited for her coming, drew her into the living room where his wife sat, bridged that trying moment with his kindly questions, and presently tided her over the luncheon hour. She knew that he did this of deliberate purpose. She could see that he was exerting himself to protect and encourage her, that he was putting forth his will to persuade his family that yesterday had changed nothing. But she saw too how vain was the effort. The icy distrust under Tom's silence, the snobbish rancor that embittered Mrs. Ballantine's civility, the disdain lurking in the curves of Ethel Hoyt's smile were realities.

She went to her room and, throwing herself on her bed, gave way to black despair. There could be no turning back the clock. It was folly to hope that Mrs. Ballantine would pardon the blow to her vanity, folly to believe that Ethel would not seize her chance to widen the breach. They might play a part before Roger, but they would still whisper together behind

closed doors and secretly poison Tom's mind against her. His wrongs filled his vision. They would magnify them till they seemed crimes.

By and by, hearing him enter the sitting room, she rose. She might have despair in her heart, but she had pride there also. He must not find her wilting under his displeasure. Moving to a glass, she smoothed her hair and in the act caught his doleful reflection as he paused an instant beside the outer door. He looked as wretched as she felt, an unhappy boy, and something maternal in her woke her pity and made her hunger to clasp him to her breast. She rounded swiftly, passed through the connecting door, and beheld another Tom than the dejected image of the mirror. He too was proud.

"I found this in my mail," he said, handing her a letter at full arm's length, and went immediately to his dressing room.

He had not come to be comforted. He wished to be let alone. She heard him moving about, opening and closing drawers. The letter emerged from the blur which had dimmed everything. She saw that it was postmarked "Newport", and that the writing was Molly's. Had he seen this also and been stung by the old jealousy? Could this have driven him upstairs? Was the rummaging in the dressing room a mere blind? She tore open the envelope and skimmed the closely written pages. The irritating name nowhere occurred. Molly spoke solely of her own affairs — her distaste for the life she led, her longing to do something that was not trivial. She seemed unhappy.

Sheila was standing with the letter in her hands

when he came out, and his glance flew to it with a directness which bore out her suspicion.

"It's from Molly," she said. "Would you care to read it?"

"No, thanks," he declined stiffly. "I don't share your interest in the Lounsbury clan."

"She writes only of herself."

"Is that why you're so willing to have me see it?"

"You know it isn't, Tom. Don't, I beg of you, rake up those old misunderstandings. They were never serious. They have nothing to do with this real trouble we're facing now."

"Haven't they? I'm not so sure."

"Tom!" she appealed, aware now of the turbid depths into which his reaction had swept him. "You must be sure. You must believe that I have been loyal to you. What have I done that you should doubt me in everything?"

"What have you done? You've lived a lie from the day of our marriage."

Her skin flamed, but a chill like the hand of death gripped her heart.

"It was a white lie," she faltered.

"White or black, you lived it — lived it day after day, month after month — bolstered it up with a thousand shifts and dodges, gulled me to the very end. My God, you've brought me to a pass where I can't tell where lies leave off, and truth begins! And you ask me not to rake up old misunderstandings. Can't you see that they won't stay buried? I won't mince words with you. I mean Lounsbury. You've never talked freely about him. I've had to drag things out of you little by little. You've always con-

sidered his feelings before mine — your husband's. How do I know that you didn't encourage him, lead him on to make love to you, like to have him do it? How do I know that you wouldn't have taken up with him if you could have got rid of me?"

The memory of an April day, the kiss she could never bring herself to confess, rose as bewildering in retrospect as it had been in living fact and now, as then, for a moment stopped her lips.

"Where is your tongue?" he demanded. "You used to be glib enough with excuses. Haven't you an answer of any sort?"

"Yes," she said. "I have an answer: I gave myself to you. Has that ceased to mean anything to you, Tom? Is your love for me dead?"

"Love!" he ejaculated.

She looked at him hopelessly and turned and walked slowly to her bedroom door.

"Love!" he repeated. "Is that your last resource?"

She drew herself up on the threshold.

"Not quite," she said. "I still have a few rags of self-respect."

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

THAT evening she followed the glow of Roger Ballantine's cigar to a little pavilion at the foot of the garden.

"Is that you, daughter?" he asked, as she came through the dark.

"It's Sheila."

"The same thing," he said, making room for her beside him. "Haven't I called you 'daughter' before?"

"No," she replied.

"Well, it's the way I think of you," he added. "Always."

Her throat tightened.

"You make it harder," she said after a moment, "but I must do it. I should loathe myself if I didn't. I—I am going to leave Tom. He will not see that I could deceive him in one thing—live a lie, as he puts it—and yet be true to him in everything else. I might be some cheap little adventuress who had tricked him. He distrusts me through and through."

He drew the story from her in fragments. She was too stirred, by turns heartsick and indignant, to tell it calmly.

"So I'm going to leave him," she repeated. "I must."

"Have you said as much to Tom?" asked Roger gravely.

"No. He'd have doubted that too — thought it an empty threat, another trick. It's useless for us to talk to each other. Every word we speak seems to drive us farther apart. The time for words is past. I must act."

"And this is the first step you've taken?"

"Coming to you? Of course. What else could I do?"

"You might have done several spectacular things. You might have hurled your clothes in a trunk, left your wedding ring on the bureau, flung out of the house, got your name and mine in the papers."

"After all you've been to me! I wouldn't hurt you for worlds."

"Yet you want to pull up stakes. Has it crossed your mind that you'll be leaving me too?"

Sheila wrung her hands.

"I've been thinking of it for hours," she said. "How could I forget it? I love you almost as much as I love Daddy Joe."

"Enough to do something for my sake?"

"Oh, don't ask me to let things go on as they are," she pleaded. "You wouldn't respect me if I simply drifted. I shouldn't respect myself. And Tom — he'd think even less of me than he does. He would despise me and have reason to despise me. I'd seem as brazen and mercenary as the lowest of the low. Don't ask me to humiliate myself like that."

"I shan't," he reassured. "All I want you to do is avoid an open break. I know as well as you that there's no reasoning with any one in his present state

of mind. I know too, though you have left it unsaid, that he is as bitter toward me as he is toward you. He looks on us as a pair of conspirators, and only cool reflection will bring him to his senses. Give him a chance to reflect, Sheila. Give him a few days' grace before you decide that the partnership is a failure."

It seemed to her that they had merely rounded a circle.

"But that means letting things go on as they are," she said. "I shall be in the same intolerable position — every day sink lower in his eyes."

"His eyes are going to have a change of scene," rejoined Roger decisively. "There's a snarl in one of our western branches which he may as well tackle. I'll start him off to-morrow."

Some hours later she heard Tom enter their sitting room. The door between was now closed, but his movements were as easy to follow as they had been that afternoon. Once again he ransacked his dressing room, this time in earnest, and presently summoned a servant to aid him. Finally the man went out burdened, and, after an interval of silence, Tom walked slowly to her door and knocked.

"Yes?" she said with a swift rejection of "Come."

He loomed in dark silhouette against the lamplight of the room behind.

"I presume the packing has kept you awake," he said, "but it had to be done. I am going away on business in the morning — out West. I can't tell when I'll be home."

She could make nothing of his face, but his tone was one of frozen martyrdom.

"I don't know of anything to hurry you back," she replied.

"Nor I," said he.

"Or to keep you now," she added, turning her cheek to the pillow, but keeping watch from beneath her lashes. "Good night."

His silhouette gained in majesty.

"It's good-by," he stated haughtily, "unless you expect to be down earlier than usual."

"I don't," she said. "Good-by."

He spun on his heel, stalked across the sitting room, and snapped off the light.

"Tom!"

He stumbled over a chair in his hasty return.

"Well?"

"Please shut my door," she requested.

The detonation shook her bed.

Thinking it over in the darkness, she felt a lift of hope. Perhaps he already repented of his harsh injustice? Perhaps only pride held him from her? Surely love had tugged at his heartstrings when he came back to her threshold. A step or two farther, a word of tenderness, a touch, and she would have forgiven him freely. She had not dared let him see her eagerness to forgive. If he knew how little she required of him! She would not wish him to abase himself. He need not unsay his bitter words. A mere sign of contrition would suffice. But he must give that sign. She believed that he would give it before he left and, by and by, dreamed that they were not estranged at all and that what she had taken for estrangement was itself a dream.

Still full of this vision, she still hoped when dawn

woke her to reality. The voices of the morning cheered her. The lord of a distant poultry yard challenged the crows in the hemlocks bordering the river. Gulls began to whistle and forage in the bay, pigeons to croon in the gravel drive below her windows. Sparrows with no ear for music mocked the robins and orioles in the elms. A pair of squirrels frisked and chattered in the eaves. No idling for her! Soon every second would be precious. She dressed for his coming and pictured his coming while she dressed. His first glance would proclaim his remorse, his rekindled faith, his need of her. And her first glance would pardon. What stammered speech of his or hers could bind them closer? Then they would breakfast together — alone. And she would go with him to the station — alone. Her face should be the last he would see, her farewell kiss his most poignant memory.

Presently a servant tiptoed past her door, tapped softly at one of the guest rooms and softly returned, and, almost at once, she heard Tom come striding along the corridor and without pausing, without even slackening his pace, go by and on and descend the stairs. She was answered. The sun which had gone down on his wrath had risen again to find it unappeased. Useless to stay herself with dreams. Useless to cheat her intelligence with the poor hope that he would yet trample on his pride, rush back to her, sweep her into his arms. Had he desired a reconciliation he would have come to her without delay. He did not desire it. Last night's crashing door had voiced his final message.

For unreckoned minutes, half an hour, a lifetime,

she sat staring at vacancy. Then a car rounded the house and halted at the portico, and she started to her feet only to sink back with a shrug of self-contempt. Why should she gaze after him? Whereupon, a woman's laugh, a laugh she knew, rippled above the throb of the engine, and with a bound she reached the window and in a fury of jealousy peered through the blinds. It was Ethel who had crept from her room without a sound; Ethel, ready to usurp her place; Ethel, armored to distract and beguile.

They were in plain view. Their voices rose clearly.

"Did I surprise you, Tom? I meant to run in town to-day and thought it would be jolly to catch your train. I simply jumped into my clothes, though. Is anything missing? Do look me over."

Densely masculine, he did her bidding.

"Your maid couldn't have turned you out better. But have you had anything to eat?"

"Not a mouthful," she replied, with another laugh. "But it doesn't matter. We'll get a bite together in New York."

"Good idea," he said. "By then I'll have a real appetite myself."

He helped her into the car. The chauffeur touched a gloved fore-finger to his cap. They were off. Side by side, without a backward glance, they vanished and, after a little while, emboldened by the silence outdoors and in, the squirrel and his mate began again to frolic in the eaves.

That day Roger took her to the hospital, went with her to her father's room, and during his stay casually broke the news of Tom's journey.

"Somebody had to hotfoot it out there," he added, "and I thought the exercise would be healthier for him than me."

She was grateful, but, alone with Joe for a moment at the end of the visit, she had only to meet his eyes to know that he suspected the truth. He did not question her, however.

"Had a talk with my sawbones this morning," he said. "Not that young squirt of an interne. I mean the real one. He thinks it won't be long before I can change my boarding place."

"I'm sure it won't," she replied. "And I'll be on the lookout for another — some cool spot near the water where we can be together every day and as long as we please. Doesn't that sound good to you?"

"Fine," he said. "But I'd doped out a different programme. I figured that as soon as I got the hang of a pair of crutches I'd make for the Jersey coast. It can't touch Connecticut for scenery, but there's more of a tang in the air."

"Very well," she agreed. "We'll go wherever you like."

He smiled up at her.

"Hard to shake, aren't you?"

"Yes," she said. "Don't try it, Daddy Joe. I'm going along. I shall stay with you till you're well again."

The resolve had come to her on the spur of the moment, but it seemed none the less reasonable as she turned it over in her mind during the dragging days that followed. If she went away to care for her father, no one could say that she had deserted Tom. As for Tom himself, he might think what he chose. She had

given up the vain enigma of his thoughts. Not a line for her had come from him. But for Roger she would have known nothing of his movements. Mrs. Ballantine excluded her son's name from the tepid remarks she dropped when they met. Unless her husband was present — and business now took him away daily — her pose was one of pained submission to the cross which Providence had saddled upon her. That this was a pose, Sheila was certain. She had seen the sorrowing mother off her guard. Her stained-glass resignation was detachable. It had no more intimate roots than the "transformation" which outdid clumsy nature on her brow.

But they met seldom. Ethel had brought the atmosphere of the New York house to Sasquatuck. Here as there the family made their personal engagements, saw their own friends, lived their separate lives. They were like transients in a sparsely patronized and highly formal hotel. And it was as a transient that Sheila now saw herself. She did not bemoan her isolation. She prayed that it might continue till the hour of her release. Her one anxiety was that Tom would find her still lingering here on his return. She could not endure that thought, and at last told Roger that she could not endure it. She flung it at him pell-mell, a torrent of protest and entreaty — her humiliation, her pride, her plan. He must be made to see that she had yielded to the last ditch short of complete and ignoble surrender.

"But I agree with you," he said quietly.

"You'll let me go?"

"I want you to go. You mean as much to me as you do to that plucky chap lying in the hospital.

I'm as keen as he to have you preserve your self-respect. I'm not only willing for you to leave with him — I've arranged for it with his consent."

"With his consent!"

"We've been thicker than you knew. Moreover I have talked with the doctor. It would be some time before such a trip as you plan would be practical, but mine can be managed at once. You wouldn't mind a little of Miss Perrin's company?"

"Mind!" Her face lighted.

"I thought not, and so I got in touch with her the other day. She's spending a few weeks at a hotel on the Sound outside of New London, and by good luck there's a sanitarium close at hand which is no more expensive and a hundred per cent. more cheerful than the Southwark hospital. You could stop there yourself, but I'd rather you wouldn't. I'd prefer to have you register at the Grafton as 'Miss Moore' — a friend of Miss Perrin's. I'll feel better to have you with her at first. There's nobody who understands you better — or me. I've known her a long while, Sheila."

"I felt that you had," she said.

"Did she tell you that we are old friends?"

"Not outright. But once she let something fall about books that brought back what you said about the girl who helped choose your library, and I was sure then that she must have been that girl."

"Yes," he replied. "It was Sophie." His gaze questioned space. "My wife doesn't know," he went on slowly. "She never came to the office while Sophie was my right bower. I intended to mention it when we went up to the school that time, but they

didn't take to each other, and I changed my mind." He paused. "Women are like that," he added and paused again. "Well," he resumed briskly, "that's the programme. We'll make the run in the *Pastime* and have an ambulance at both ends of the line."

They embarked next morning at a dock not far from the hospital, passed from river to Sound, and, heading eastward, glimpsed the long white dwelling under the elms. Wreathed in mist, it looked the ghost of a house, and it was with ghosts in truth that Sheila peopled it as it dropped swiftly astern.

But it was no realm of shades she reached at her journey's end. The great summer hotel on the rocks was of the world, worldly, and the Sophie Perrin who made her welcome had lost none of her vitality, her breezy confidence, her grip on things as they are.

"So much for the wrong side of the ledger," she said, their first night together after Sheila had put the situation before her. "Now let's take a look at the assets. You have youth, beauty, brains, and health. You've virtually had that other fairy godmother gift, wealth, for you have seen it at close quarters. You have picked up not only what passes for an education, but a certain amount of the experience of life which is education. Just now you may feel that you'd prefer ignorance to some of your knowledge of human nature, but you must get rid of that feeling. It leads to self-pity, and self-pity leads nowhere. Plenty of marriages fail. Possibly yours has failed. Face the possibility. Don't count on any one but yourself. Thank your stars that you once earned your own living and if need be can do it again."

She spoke in the strain she judged would best help this girl to find herself. At heart she grieved for her plight, and two days later her real tenderness went out to her in ungrudging measure. Sheila had set forth for the sanitarium that morning with a step as buoyant as Sophie's. She came dragging back, white, haggard, distraught.

"I must get work," she said. "Make money."

"But what is it? Have you had bad news — heard from your husband?"

"Tom?" She shook her head. "No; I haven't heard from him. I don't expect to hear. I've stopped counting on him — just as you said I must. And I'm not pitying myself. Don't think that. It's my father I pity. He'll never be able to do his old work — the new doctor told me so. Something is wrong with the tendons. He'll always be lame."

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

THEY ranged the field of woman's work and, seen through Sophie Perrin's eyes, this field was boundless.

"Look at what the 'weaker sex' are doing in this war," she said. "Everywhere they've taken up the tasks men have dropped. We're living in another Renaissance — Woman's Renaissance. To-day no woman worth her salt fears to fight her own battle. To-day no woman with a soul above that of an odalisque will subject herself to the whims of a man rather than strike out for herself."

There was nothing amiss with the temper of Sheila's soul, but she thought she could better appreciate than Sophie what an odalisque would feel if pitched into the world. Her own attainments seemed chiefly ornamental. Save the elementary rules of salesmanship, what in sober fact did she know that was practical? To what could she at once turn her hand that would promise more than a living wage for herself alone? Her father's insurance money would merely cover his urgent needs. The chance that he might obtain damages from the railroad company was best left out of the reckoning. Such claims often dragged for years and profited no one but the

lawyers. And out of the reckoning also she cast the hope that he, middle-aged, a cripple, could begin life anew. It was she who must safeguard their future, be the breadwinner, maintain the home.

But how? Where? Her thoughts turned toward the goal of Daddy Joe's recent dreams, the golden El Dorado which now he would never reach. If press agents could be believed, girls not so well equipped as she were earning vast sums by acting for the films. Gumpel had said — but the man's gross flesh came between her and his words, tainted the world of which he was a part. Yet, had none like him infested it, that way was clearly not for her. She owed Roger Ballantine too much to cry her wares in so public a market. Her father would never consent to let her follow in the footsteps of Lew Pam. It was for no such destiny that her mother had filled the hope chest.

Then, out of the mystery of her subconsciousness, like a voice from the air, flashed her inspiration.

"Listen!" she exclaimed. "After all, the one thing I can do fairly well is sell goods. I know how to handle customers — how to help them make up their minds without giving them the feeling that they're being driven. It's like a game, and I used to enjoy playing it. And if I enjoyed doing it for an employer, I'd put twice the energy into doing it for myself. And I have something of my own to sell, Miss Perrin. You once told me that those things which belonged to my mother are valuable. Now is the time to prove it. I never thought I could bring myself to part with them — for money." Her voice faltered. "They're so precious that — oh, I can't

tell you how much they mean to me. But my independence means more," she went on, controlling herself. "I'll use mother's things as I know she herself would use them if she were standing in my place. I'll start a gift shop — make her hope chest found a business — deserve its name."

Sophie looked her frank admiration.

"I'm proud of you," she said slowly. "That is more than a sound commercial idea. It's a trumpet call, a declaration of independence, a creed."

They began to shape a definite plan, and here the older woman's practicality told. Sheila mentioned Atlantic City, a shop of some sort on the Board Walk.

"At the end of the summer season?" said Sophie. "Never. You'd no more than be ready when your birds would have flown. And, even if it were earlier than it is, it would be a mistake for you to take a shop. Keep down the overhead charges till you are on your feet. Let some one else worry over rent day. Here is the spot for you to try your experiment — right here in the Grafton, which is crowded now and will be for weeks to come. It's perfectly feasible. There are often sales of one sort or another in the small parlors off that peacock alley between the lobby and the main dining room. Some one showed gowns just before you came. Let me go to the manager. I have known him for years."

She went in search of him and after half an hour returned triumphant.

"He's willing," she announced. "It was settled in ten minutes. The rest of the time, minus a minute at the end, I've spent in listening to his views on our

foreign policy and a fancy sketch of his new orange grove in Florida. His wife, by the way, was one of my pupils, but I did not mix friendship with your affair. He's a business man first of all, and first of all I talked ten per cent. He took my word for it that the things are unusual, and that the price marks will reflect the high cost of living. Then, as I say, we discussed submarines and oranges. The latter topic wasn't so irrelevant as you might think. It reminded him that he also had a hotel in Florida and gave me an opening to suggest that, if you did well here, it would pay him to let you in at Palm Beach. But you needn't worry on that score. It's profoundly true that nothing succeeds like success. A business that's a go doesn't have to ask favors. It grants them. It's the start that sends shivers through the timid pocket nerve."

Sheila threw her arms round her.

"You're a wonderful woman — a wonderful friend," she said. "You've laid hold as if this venture were your own."

Sophie laughed.

"I almost wish it were," she replied. "I'm a real American. I love to take a chance. But now let's get down to details. Where is your stock in trade?"

"The hope chest? In the house at Sasquatuck. I'll write Mr. Ballantine at once — tell him what I've learned about father, what I want to do."

"You mean what you intend to do. Make it positive. Don't give him the impression that you can be talked out of it. You are standing up for something that's worth while, and he'll be quick to grasp it or I don't know Roger Ballantine. He'll

not oppose you, Sheila. Your coming here under your maiden name simplifies everything. No; he'll not oppose you. He'll respect your backbone. Would you care to have me see him?"

"Could you?"

"If he's to be in New York to-morrow I can. I must go down on a school matter and may stay overnight. I'll make a point of seeing him, and I'll also call on some of the wholesale people who deal in table linen and embroideries. I know of one firm that handles more or less convent work, the very sort of things to add to your own."

"Haven't I enough to begin with?"

"To begin with, yes; but not enough to carry you far. Your supply isn't as large as it seems. It might melt away altogether the very day you open. I've seen women at resorts go mad in a body and fairly mob some Syrian peddling sleazy rubbish. Speaking of rubbish, you will require a consignment of it yourself when you start your real gift shop — freakish dinner favors, art nouveau gimcracks, local souvenirs, and like horrors. But here your problem is simple. You'll have only one line to push, and only one class of customers to study. These women can discriminate, but they're not immune to the shopping fever, and they have ample means to gratify it when it seizes them. We mustn't be caught napping. We must prepare for emergencies, mix in other work, samples at least — perhaps I can get them on approval — and stand ready to fill orders. Don't think I'm letting my enthusiasm run away with me. I'm no relation whatever to Colonel Mulberry Sellers, and I don't dream except when I'm asleep.

This is a business proposition, and we must look at it in a businesslike way."

She whirled off in the morning, a radiant incarnation of the gospel she preached, and Sheila went with fresh courage to her father. She had need of courage. Unaware of the doctor's verdict, Joe spun airy plans which wrung her heart with their futility. She said nothing to undeceive him. All too soon he himself would doubt and question. Then, when even his spirit drooped, she would uplift him with her good news, tell him what she had achieved, what they would achieve together as partners by and by. Neither spoke openly of Tom. Since the day Roger casually mentioned his sudden departure, they had avoided his name. She felt sure that he could not mistake the meaning of his long absence and as certain that he thought the rift of little moment. Under all his talk ran the blithe assumption that she would go back to the fairyland from which his mishap had recalled her. It would go hard with him when this dream met the stern logic of facts. She foresaw that, idolizing her as he did, its wreck would dwarf his personal tragedy.

"Do you know," she said abruptly, "I haven't a particle of the fear of being poor that haunts so many people."

Joe's eyes twinkled.

"That ghost wouldn't be apt to loaf around your neighborhood, Sheila Ballantine."

"But I felt the same when I was Sheila Moore," she insisted. "I lived up to every cent I earned, but I never worried lest I couldn't earn more. And it wasn't because I knew that at a pinch I could fall

back on you. I simply wasn't afraid. Any woman worth her salt can make her own way nowadays. We're finding out that there are thousands of things to which we can turn our hands. Think of what women are doing in Europe while the men are in the trenches!" Then, having borrowed so freely, she helped herself to more. "We're living in a new age," she proclaimed. "This is Woman's Renaissance."

"Is it?" he said, his amusement turning to wonder. "And what may that mean?"

"A time of rebirth — a general waking up. And I'm waking up too, Daddy Joe. I wasn't meant to stick in a rut. You'll yet hear of me launching out."

But he refused to take her seriously.

"Sure I will," he assented. "It'll be in the *Pas-time*. That's certainly some boat. I'm glad I had a sail in her. It made me feel like a millionaire myself."

It seemed to her that by a mad caprice of fate they had changed places. She had become the parent who saw life as it was, he the child who dwelt in the rose-colored world of imagination. So be it. Let him keep his illusions while he might.

! Giving him such hours as she could snatch from the busy days that followed, she without his knowledge did the thing she had to do. And now no doubt that it was the thing to do assailed her. She was acting with the sanction of Roger Ballantine.

"Go ahead," ran his laconic reply. "I would not stop you if I could."

Sophie Perrin smiled over this note.

"He was rather more expansive with me," she said. "He told me that he was damned proud of your grit."

"Did he?" cried Sheila. "I couldn't ask more than that."

"Nor I. I'd feel as if I had been decorated for valor. But to my mind he has paid you a still greater compliment in not offering to help."

"But why should he? He knows that I could not take a penny from him for my father's support. He knows that I shan't accept anything for myself hereafter. I wrote him that my allowance must stop. If he sends me money, I'll return it."

"He won't," predicted Sophie. "That isn't his way."

Midnight of a Thursday saw them ready, and early the next morning Sheila let herself into the showroom, made a final tour of the tables and then, with quickened breath and weakened knees, threw wide the doors to fortune.

She had ample leisure to regain her poise before Peacock Alley came to life and still another vast span of waiting before any of the sex which needlework allures drifted by to breakfast. These forerunners were one and all of advanced years and, if the time they spent in the dining room was a fair measure of their appetite, they stuffed themselves with a recklessness which might well prove fatal. But why should only the aged eat? Where were the younger fair, the girls, the near-girls, the still more girlish matrons of the unconfessed forties who usually swarmed the corridors? Dieting? Ill? Decamped?

Then Sophie, robed in crisp whiteness, came smiling in and lifted her from the abyss of her dark conjectures.

"Breakfasted?" she asked.

"Hours ago. But nobody else has — that is, nobody who counts. This place looks like an old ladies' home to-day. You're the first woman under seventy I've seen, and the only creature in skirts who has so much as glanced through the doorway. Where are our customers?"

"Getting their beauty sleep after last night's dance. There was a dance, you know."

"I do remember hearing music," said Sheila, "but I never once wondered about it. How I've changed!" She stood amazed at her maturity. "Oh, well; if I'm in for a dull forenoon, I am. Is there anything I can do while I wait to make the display more attractive?"

Sophie's glance skimmed the tables and with a merry gleam came back to the girl's glowing loveliness.

"Yes," she returned. "I have one suggestion. You are an important part of the display yourself. Stand where you can be seen from the door."

Sheila laughed and blushed.

"Is that business?"

"Ballantine and Hoyt would think so. I'm merely taking a leaf from their book."

She went her alert way to breakfast, and her advice slipped from Sheila's anxious mind. Serving a counter for Ballantine and Hoyt was a far more tranquil task than this. No wonder she had taken no thought of the future in those days! She could have felt scarcely more responsibility than a butterfly.

Two gilded youths, sauntering from the dining room, spied her profile, exchanged a look of artless joy in their discovery, and promptly turned in at the door.

"Good morning," said White Flannels. "Are these things for sale?"

"Yes," said Sheila gravely. "Are you interested in needlework?"

"Rather!"

"Oh, tremendously," chimed in his fellow humorist in Norfolk jacket and knickers. "We want to see everything."

Her gesture bestowed the freedom of the room, but they seemed loath to stray from her immediate neighborhood.

"Is this sale for the Belgians?" asked the Norfolk.

"No," she replied. "For Americans."

White Flannels applauded this innovation and wished her luck.

"Thank you," she said. "That sampler is very quaint, isn't it?"

"Sampler?"

"The one in your hands."

He perceived that he had hands and that they held a sampler.

"Seems to have a motto on it," he remarked.

"Yes," she assented. "Samplers often have."

"What does it say?" he asked, improving the chance for a closer approach. "Your eyes are younger than mine."

"'Modesty is the Handmaid of Virtue'," she read with careful enunciation.

He dropped the fabric as if it scorched his fingers, and the Norfolk jacket inconsiderately laughed. It was a full-throated laugh which carried to Peacock Alley and, drawn by its promise, hopeful faces blocked

the threshold. Then, of a sudden, the room seemed choked with gilded youths athirst for information which only Sheila could impart.

Presently White Flannels won his way through the press to her side.

"Don't waste your time on those bluffers," he said.

"They don't want to buy."

"Do you?"

"Yes," he declared. "I want that sampler thing. How much is it?"

She hid her amazement at his decision and he his at her price.

"I'll take it," he said gamely.

As she wrapped his purchase, she was stabbed with a sharp realization of its meaning — the scattering of her most cherished treasure had begun; but she braced herself for the sacrifice and, the sale complete, smiled in gentle compassion on her first patron.

"You might frame it, you know," she suggested.

"Is that what they do with them?"

"Sometimes. I've also seen them used in trays under glass."

"Great!" he exclaimed. "I'll have a cocktail tray made for my den."

Sheila felt that the puritan grandmother whose handiwork this was had righteous cause to turn in her grave, but the thought did not prevent her from trying to sell other samplers for the same purpose. An ancestress whose favorite proverb was "Modesty is the Handmaid of Virtue" could not be expected to grasp the overwhelming scope of Woman's Renaissance.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

THE masculine invasion broke and melted away at Sophie's return, and a sedate procession of old ladies began to peer and finger and admire.

"But they don't buy," said Sheila.

"Never mind," Sophie consoled. "They'll advertise."

The visitors grew in number and lessened in age. From noon till one o'clock the room was crowded with women. But these too came merely to look. Then the call of hunger thinned their ranks, and presently there remained only three who suddenly wheeled and bolted for the dining room abreast.

"They'll think it over during luncheon," said Sophie. "Get something to eat yourself and be ready for them."

The returning tide set in a little before two and, half an hour later, the tables were hemmed about like bargain counters in a Christmas rush. Seen from Peacock Alley, the scene was one to dismay husbands. From Sheila's point of view it had the air of a museum where even admission was free. Once again there was the semblance rather than the substance of prosperity. No spendthrift frenzy, no shopping madness, seized her visitors. One of the morning's callers after long deliberation selected a dozen napkins. Another,

more extravagant, bought a tea cloth. Then, lured by motor rides, the bathing beach, bridge, veranda gossip, siestas, and the evening's preparatory rites, they ebbed away, and four o'clock saw only Sheila and Sophie putting to rights their disordered stock in trade.

"Better run over and see your father now," said Sophie. "I'll look after things for another hour, though it's hardly worth our while to keep open."

The girl's eyes filled.

"Have we failed?"

"Failed? What a question! Of course we haven't. When you consider that our bellwether has strayed off bounds, I think we've done remarkably well."

"Oh," said Sheila. "I didn't know we had one to consider."

"There's always a bellwether. Here at the Grafton its name is Mrs. T. Spencer Witherspoon. Just why she should be the local lawgiver I don't know, but she is, and she has gone yachting for the day. To-morrow, if she isn't too sunburned or still seasick, she may cheer us with the light of her countenance. Whether she does or not, these things will sell, but a purchase or two on her part might stampede the flock."

That night she pointed out the redoubtable lady as, squired by her son, she trailed augustly down the vast acreage of the dining room.

"Why, it's White Flannels!" gasped Sheila.

"Who?"

"That boy with her. He was my first customer."

"The prince royal! Was he the innocent who bought the sampler for a cocktail tray?"

"Yes." She gazed round-eyed across the table. "What if he tells her! It may spoil everything."

Sophie threw a laughing glance after the youth.

"Perish the thought," she said. "Surely White Flannels is one of those deep silent souls who tell nothing."

The upshot proved them both wide of the mark. When the queen regnant entered the showroom next day, the prince royal bore her company. They came early, almost among the first, and, while the maternal lorgnon made a critical inspection of the tables, White Flannels' unaided eyes dogged Sheila.

"I showed her that sampler," he confided, when the arrival of other visitors gave him a chance. "It was a fool thing to do."

"Was it? I hope she didn't disapprove?"

"Disapprove? I should say not. She kept it herself."

"Don't you care," she comforted him. "I've still a few left."

"None of them would mean the same to me," he said.

Mrs. T. Spencer Witherspoon's authoritative voice cut the silence which seemed the only fitting response.

"I'll take this, and this and this," she announced. "Your things are exquisite."

Never were words more welcome or more eloquent. The lawgiver had spoken. The faithful heard. His mission fulfilled, the poor prince royal faded from sight. The sale, the real sale, began.

When Sophie came, she came to stay and toil, and not until they were devouring the sandwiches which were the only lunch they had time to snatch

did she confess that this was the first food to pass her lips that day.

"But I'd have dropped in my tracks rather than miss a minute of this glorious forenoon," she declared. "Do you realize what's happened? You've got your start. The way is clear to Florida — yes, to everything beyond Florida that you want to reach. I'm going to wire Mr. Ballantine. I promised to let him know if there was good news, and now I can."

Sheila was reluctant to build such hopes on the morning's trade. She thought that for once clear-headed Sophie had allowed herself to dream. But, even while she doubted, the midday lull ended, the room filled again, and the cash register which the management had loaned once more took up its staccato ring and hiccup of success. One had to believe a cash register. It was as unemotional as an adding machine. Business was still going on. Business would go on. Not every day like this, of course. There would be dull times here and elsewhere. But Sophie was right. She had got her start. Her cheeks glowed with the certainty that she had justified her challenge of fortune. She felt a dynamo of energy, a being above human weariness and discouragement and pain.

It was thus that she arrested the brown eyes of a girl in motoring clothes who passed through Peacock Alley, and the next instant she was whirled about and smothered in Molly Lounsbury's embrace.

"What *are* you doing here?" she cried, holding her off to look at her.

"A driving trade — Glory be!"

"But what for? Is this a fair?"

"No, Molly; a business." She handed a customer her change. "Of my own. Excuse me a minute, dear, while I serve that woman who's flagging me with a dresser scarf. You'll find Miss Perrin over there among the table linens. She'll be delighted to see you."

Sheila lost sight of her for an interval and then found her waiting, all eagerness, at her side.

"Want another saleswoman?" she queried. "I'd like awfully to help."

Sheila squeezed her fingers.

"You always were a brick," she said. "Pitch in."

Presently she met Sophie at the cash register.

"Molly looked petrified at finding me here," she said, "but I didn't explain. What did you tell her?"

"That you were trying an experiment in self-support."

"She asked no questions?"

"No. She only said she envied you."

Whereupon Molly joined them.

"I've made a sale!" she announced, flushed with excitement. "An actual, honest-to-goodness sale! Let me have five dollars back from this ten. And do show me how you work the keys of this thing. Looks a cross between a typewriter and a doll's piano, doesn't it? I want to learn all the ropes while I have the chance. It's perfectly thrilling to be doing something practical. And such fun! I've helped at bazaars, of course, but that was simply robbery. This is real business, and it's wonderful."

She was still intoxicated with the wonder of it when the final customer, who chanced to be her customer, went her way, and came dancing across the

room to the window seat where her friends had dropped.

"I feel alive at last," she said. "If you only knew how I've longed to do some real work. I begged father to let me go to England and join the Red Cross when one of my friends sailed a month ago, but he wouldn't hear to it. And he wouldn't hear to my starting a tea room with another friend, though I had an original idea for it, something that's never been tried. But he might let me go in with you, Sheila. You've proved what a girl can do. Why can't we get together and carry out both our plans? I'd love to be in business with you. Don't smile! I'm serious. I wouldn't take it up as a fad and then drop it for another fad."

"I'm sure you wouldn't," said Sheila. "But you might for a husband."

"What nonsense! I don't expect to marry. And, even if I should, I trust I'll still have a mind of my own. You are under no one's thumb. You haven't let a husband stand in the way of—of—" She stopped, entangled, and then with a wave of color demanded: "Why should a woman change her nature with her name?"

Sophie Perrin roused.

"My brain isn't equal to that riddle just now," she said. "Let's brace ourselves with a swim. I can loan you a bathing suit, Molly, if you haven't one with you. But perhaps you're going on at once? I haven't had time to ask where you came from or whither you're bound."

"I'm motoring back from the Berkshires. A breakdown delayed us so long this morning that we

decided to stop at the Grafton. I hoped I'd find you still here."

"Are any of your family with you?"

"Only Stoughton," she replied. "I suppose he's wondering what has become of me."

Sheila no longer felt a dynamo of energy, but she got nimbly to her feet.

"Some one will be wondering what has become of me," she said to Sophie. "I think I'll go to the sanitarium while you swim." Then, meeting Molly's puzzled eyes: "My father is here, convalescing from an accident," she explained. "I give him every minute I can."

Climbing the winding road, she told herself that she had merely postponed the inevitable. Of course Molly suspected that her marriage had turned out badly. Her slip of the tongue had betrayed her. Why hide the truth now? Why, on the instant she learned that Stoughton was here, had she invoked the sheltering excuse of her father's injury? Was it loyalty to Tom who had forfeited her loyalty? Was it consideration for Roger Ballantine? Or, to be candid, was it mistrust of the one she knew best of all? Questions easier to put than answer. She could not give a frank yes or no to any of the three. She could only feel the force of the impulse on which she had acted.

Joe's gaze tried her with its fond solicitude.

"You look all in, honey," he greeted her. "When you told me that you were going to spend the day with Miss Perrin, I thought it would do you a heap of good. Was it a bum picnic? Didn't you enjoy yourself?"

"Indeed I did," she said in all sincerity. "But it

wasn't a picnic in the sense you mean. I've been helping with some work that had to be done."

"What kind of work?"

"I can't tell you yet. It's a secret."

"Even from me?"

"Even from you, Daddy Joe."

"Is the job finished?"

"No."

"Will to-morrow wind it up?"

"To-morrow is Sunday. But you mustn't ask questions."

"All right," he assented. "But, whatever it was, it's taken the starch out of you, and you shouldn't have topped it off by coming up here."

"As if I'd miss coming!" she said gayly. "I'm going to have dinner with you, if they'll let me, and spend the whole evening."

He beamed at the idea and, by and by, when a tray came for each of them, wove a fabric of make-believe around the simple meal. Beef broth became turtle, roast mutton changed to venison, plain spring water turned to champagne. He called for speeches from guests of high distinction and supplied his notables with apt gestures and remarks. Theodore Roosevelt expounded the state of the nation, Chauncey Depew produced his favorite jests, De Wolf Hopper consented to recite "Casey at the Bat." And, every now and then, the toastmaster would inquire "Are we downhearted?" and the celebrities with one voice would stoutly answer "No!"

"There's a bunch of big guns who'd have been tickled foolish to come," said Daddy Joe, "but I believe in keeping my little dinners select."

He made her leave before she wished, but the hour was late enough, she thought, to warrant her going straight to her room when she reached the hotel. Very likely Molly would be paying a bedtime call on Miss Perrin next door, but there was nothing to dread in a chat with her. Dread! Of what was she afraid? Why should she shun Stoughton Lounsbury? It had been stupid of her to keep away. She should have gone back for dinner, met him naturally, put a smiling face on the present, and ignored the past. To-morrow must rectify to-night's blunder.

Spurred to this saner course, she walked swiftly down the avenue of pines that led from the sanitarium to the high road. White globes of light capped the gateposts where the pines ended and dazzled her with their glare. Outside the radius all was inky blackness. She did not see him till he loomed at her very side.

"I thought you'd never come, Sheila."

"You!"

Gone the calm greeting, the worldly poise, which were to set formal bounds between them. No school-girl, she felt, could have blurted out her surprise more awkwardly. No schoolgirl could have faced him more blankly as he held fast both her hands and searched her eyes.

"God knows I didn't mean to pounce out on you like a bandit," he said. "But I've waited I don't know how long — it seems years — listening for your step, seeing your face in every shadow. I've been starving for a sight of you, dear. When I heard to-night that you were here, that perhaps I had the

right —” A movement of her captive fingers checked him, but he would not let her go. “Sheila! You know I worship you. Don’t put me off as you did Molly. Is it true that you have left Ballantine — that you’re free?”

She looked at him an instant and then, for lack of words kind enough, slowly shook her head.

“Are you answering both my questions?”

“Please!” she entreated. “You make me so unhappy — so ashamed.”

“Ashamed?”

“I ought to have stopped you — somehow — from caring. I never realized that you cared as much as this.”

“But you haven’t been to blame,” he said quickly. “You shan’t reproach yourself. Loving you has been the finest thing in my life — it always will be. It isn’t something I can uproot and forget. It only grows stronger. I can’t — I won’t — believe that I’ve lost you.”

“What are you saying?”

“Only what I feel I’ve now the right to say. Your marriage was a mistake. You’ve found out that it was a mistake. You wouldn’t be here, starting a business for yourself, if things were all right between you and Ballantine. If you haven’t broken with him, you’re on the verge of it. You’ve learned that his love isn’t the kind that lasts. But mine is. You won’t doubt that now. Come to me, Sheila. You can love me if you will.”

If she would! Facing her there, all ardor and adoration, he stirred a deeper feeling than pity. No normal woman thinks coldly of any man who has

desired her above other women. Her heart dedicates a corner to his memory, a niche if not a shrine. And, since April, Sheila had not thought coldly of this lover. She granted all his virtues, saw no flaw. Had he been the first to plead, who could say that he would have pleaded in vain? Not she. But he had not been the first. She had given herself to another, given herself joyously. April was a paler memory than June.

"Speak to me, Sheila! Tell me that my chance has come at last?"

"But I cannot."

"Cannot? Do you mean that it is too soon — that I must be patient?"

She meant something far different, a verity which only now shone clear of the mists which had veiled and distorted it till she had been ready to believe it a mirage.

"I love my husband," she answered.

He dropped her hands.

"Forgive me," he said unsteadily. "I thought — but you know what I thought. I can only apologize. I do apologize."

Side by side they passed down the dark road. To Sheila it stretched like a penitential way without reward or hope of reward at its weary end. But it was not for herself that she grieved.

"I'm not worth it, Stoughton," she said. "You have never really known me, you and Molly. I don't belong in your world. I'm just another Cinderella, as you might have guessed that night at Sherry's. I was a clerk in a Ballantine and Hoyt shop when I met Tom."

He stopped abruptly.

"Why do you tell me this?"

"To open your eyes. I want you to see that the girl you love and the girl I am are not the same."

"But you can't. They are the same. What does it matter to me that you once clerked in a store?"

"It would matter if I bore your name. Sooner or later every one would know the whole story."

"Every one might know."

"It would make a difference."

"Not to me. Nothing a few snobs might say could change my feelings toward you. Nothing you can say will change them. When I kissed you that day, I knew that you were the one woman. It was only a stolen kiss to you — I see that now — but to me it was a revelation. You can't take that away from me. You can't make yourself less precious in my eyes. It's you, just as you are — true as steel, every inch a thoroughbred — that I love." He gazed at her a moment in the dim starlight. "And always shall," he added with the solemnity of a vow. "I'll never stop wanting you, never stop hoping that my hour will come."

They went on in silence, rounded the last hill, and looked down on the thousand and one lights of the hotel. The station omnibus overtook them in the grounds, clattered on ahead into the forecourt, and discharged a single passenger who, instead of following his luggage indoors, turned and came toward them.

"It's Tom," she said, with a catch in her voice. "Tom!"

Her companion started and then, with upflung head

and unwavering eyes, walked on. But it was no choleric boy who met them.

"I've come, Sheila," he said, and gravely kissed her and offered Lounsbury his hand. "Are you stopping here too?"

Stoughton went through the ancient rite with impassive face.

"Only for the night," he answered.

CHAPTER THIRTY

THEIR eyes followed him across the court, lost him in a doorway, and came back to each other.

"I can't say what I want to say in this place, Sheila. Take me to your room."

She hesitated and then, without speaking, led the way through the lobby to her salesroom. Tom looked round him with a quick flush as she turned on the lights and closed the door.

"This is where you —"

"Where I've made good," she said quietly. "Sit down, Tom."

He remained standing.

"Oh, see here," he blurted out. "I've been a cad, and that's all there is of it."

She looked at him a moment.

"You are partly right," she said. "But that isn't all there is of it."

"Don't meet me in that spirit. I've been through hell."

"So have I. But I've struggled out of it — without your lifting a finger to help — and I'm going to stay out, Tom."

"Sheila!" he appealed. "For God's sake don't talk like that! I don't deserve to have you look at me, but — oh, it's been unbearable. I can't live

without you. I came home to tell you this, to ask you to forgive me. I knew nothing of your bad news, nothing of this business scheme of yours, till I reached New York this afternoon. I was on my way to you when I heard these things from father. He'll tell you so if my word won't suffice."

"I don't doubt your word."

"Then be kind. Think of all we've been to each other."

"I do," she said. "But by 'all' I mean 'all.' You are asking me to remember only the happy moments."

"They're the only ones that count."

"No. The others count too. I can't forget them, and I won't go through any more like them. I'd rather make my own way."

"Than live with me!"

"Than live with any one who distrusts me. I'm not a saint. I deceived you about my father. But the deception harmed me far more than it did you — cost me far more. It made you think me a fraud all through."

"Sheila —"

"No — listen! I'm not bringing this up to reproach you. I don't feel bitter toward you. I have put myself in your place oftener than you realize. Perhaps in your place I'd have thought as you did. But what matters now is that you had those thoughts. You can't blot them out. You've had them, and you'll have them again. They'll always stand between us."

"No," he declared. "They'll draw us together. I'll never distrust you again."

"Don't promise the impossible. You can't know."

"I do know. I know because I'm a changed man. I have proved it to-night."

"To-night?"

"Yes — just now — out there in the court. I didn't go up in the air when I found Lounsbury with you. Have I even asked you what he's doing here?"

"Not yet."

Tom, the regenerate, swallowed.

"You say that to try me out," he returned. "But I'm past all that hot-headed folly, Sheila. Keep him for a friend if you like. Go on with this business if you like. But don't stop loving me."

"I haven't," she said.

"You darling!" He strode toward her.

"But we're better off apart —"

He advanced mute arguments to the contrary. Time sped.

"Where is your room?" he asked at length.

"Three floors up — next door to Miss Perrin's."

"H-mn!" he said. "Well, we'll slip in quietly."

"We!"

"Certainly."

"But you can't, dear."

"Can't what?"

"Use my room. Haven't I explained that I'm here as Miss Moore?"

"Ye Gods!" he ejaculated. "Boston all over again!"

"I'm sorry."

"Why, it's preposterous —"

"Isn't it?"

"We've only just told each other that we'd let

nothing separate us. Are we going back on our word — our sacred promise?"

"One night won't matter so much."

"One night! We may be here for weeks. It all depends on your father."

They gazed down the appalling gulf.

"But we needn't stay at the Grafton after my sale ends," she said, brightening. "We'll go to another hotel."

"There isn't another."

"There must be."

"A decent one, I mean. Not within miles of the sanitarium. I know this whole shore."

His reply prompted a startling thought.

"Wouldn't it be dreadful if they couldn't give you a room of any sort to-night!" she exclaimed. "This place is always jammed over Sunday. Last week they turned people away."

"They won't turn me away."

"But what can you do if there isn't a room to be had?"

Tom straightened.

"Do!" he said. "Tell them you're my wife and be done with it. I'm past caring what anybody thinks."

Their relations were not destined to puzzle the Grafton. As they returned from the sanitarium on the morrow, Tom was handed a telegram from his mother. Roger Ballantine was ill. The message said no more than this, but the papers they snatched as they boarded their train gave brief details. Late yesterday he had had an apoplectic seizure at his office and been taken to his city home.

Tom stared at her with self-accusing eyes.

"If I'd only realized — stayed with him a little longer! But how could I know? He looked as well as you or I. But I ought to have waited, not rushed off as I did. He must have lain there till the watchman came. All the force had gone. Why didn't I wait? Why haven't I been a better son?"

She blanched with a sickening fear. Had they quarreled there in the deserted offices? Was Tom crushed by a remorse which would haunt him all his days? Did he believe that some word of his, his conduct, had brought this tragedy to pass? The halting phrases with which she strove to comfort him sounded meaningless. They were a cruel mockery if what she feared was true. Yet she dared not question him.

Three hours of this! Then the terminal, busy with its own concerns; the careless city; the great gray house. A somber stillness wrapped the cold magnificence of the hall. The linen coverings, like ceremonies and trappings of woe, made all things mournful. It seemed as if the whole lordly pile had become a mausoleum for Roger Ballantine.

Ben let them in — the human Ben, with red-rimmed lids and twitching mouth.

"My father?"

"Sleeping, they say, Mr. Tom. I've just come in from the country."

She waited in the shrouded twilight of the drawing room while Tom hurried in search of his mother. She would have gone with him had he asked her, but she could not go unasked. Even now she did not feel one of them, privileged to share the common

grief. Mrs. Ballantine might resent her sympathy. The link between them was broken. Her steadfast champion could no longer impose his will. What a tower of strength had fallen! This room, the dim library beyond, all the hushed house was quick with reminders of his sheltering kindness, his great-hearted love. She wept for him as if he were already dead.

Tom came.

"You've seen him?"

"For a moment. He wants us both."

She passed to the simple room which, in sickness or in health, Roger Ballantine had found sufficient for his needs. He did not stir as she entered, but his eyes lighted and, when she bent and kissed him, he smiled.

"Don't you pull a long face, daughter," he greeted her. "I'm counting on you to break up the gloom. Draw up a chair. I want to tell you something."

"But you must rest now," she said. "The nurse told me so at the door."

"Time enough for that by and by," he replied slowly. "Sit close so I can see you and hold your hand. No — the other side. My right arm is out of commission to-day. There!" He gave her face a fond scrutiny and glanced past her at Tom. "You two have made it up?"

"Yes," she said. "Last night."

"Did it take long?"

"Not very."

"I thought it wouldn't. That's what brought him back, Sheila. All the way."

"I know."

"All the way," he repeated. "He didn't need any

lectures from me. He didn't get any. But I showed him Sophie's wire, and I was glad I had it to show. I wanted you to succeed — wanted it for his sake as much as yours. It'll be a wholesome thing for him to remember when you clash again."

"But we won't," she said. "We need each other. Both of us see it now."

"Yes," he assented. "But I want Tom here to go on seeing it. I want him to realize that, if he isn't good to you, somebody else is waiting for the chance. I want you to feel as independent as if you were my own child, and he some other man's son. And so you shall, Sheila. I'm going to fill that hope chest again."

"Oh," she cried, "don't speak as if —"

"As if I knew what the rest of you know?" he said. "Why not? I suppose I'll get better of this attack — even to-day my head feels clear; but I'm not fool enough to believe that I can get well. I've had my warning to set my house in order. I've had others — not so strong, but warnings. It's two months now since I made my will. I've left you money — plenty of it. I want you to have friends and, if you have money, you'll always have friends. But you'll get that when the others get theirs. It hasn't anything to do with what is going into the hope chest now. This is only what I'd have spent on you if you'd been here always. I wish you had, my dear."

"I couldn't love you more," she said, choking back a sob.

"Nor I you. I took to you the night you came here first — a scared little bride — and you've gone on winding yourself round my heart ever since." He lost himself in thought a moment. "I always wanted

a daughter," he went on. "Not because I didn't care for Tom. I wanted a girl too — some one I could pet and maybe spoil a little." He paused and looked at his son. "I couldn't risk it with a boy. You know that, don't you, Tom?"

"Yes," he said brokenly. "And I know that I've never tried to save you worry — never stopped to think that you'd like a little affection. I've just gone my own way. Sheila has given you something that the rest of us haven't. I see that clearly now."

His father smiled.

"You'd make a poor witness in a lawsuit," he said. "All I wanted was a plain yes." He closed his eyes. "Perhaps I'd better mind the nurse and sleep."

They turned to steal from the room.

"Sheila?"

"Yes."

"Ever think of the time we went blackfishing?"

"Often," she replied.

"So do I," he said drowsily. "It came home to me then what a lot I'd missed."

"Darby the Yank" fights with the Tanks

A YANKEE IN THE TRENCHES

By **CORPORAL R. DERBY HOLMES**
OF BOSTON

*Late of the 22d London Battalion of the Queen's Royal West
Surrey Regiment*

12mo. Illustrated. \$1.35 net

The actual life of a soldier on the Western front in billets, in the trenches, over the top, across no-man's land and in hand-to-hand conflicts with the Germans is here vividly related by a gallant young American who fought in the English army, until, twice wounded, he was invalided home. Corporal Holmes fought in the battles of the Somme where he witnessed the first of the tanks in action. He participated in thrilling charges and he only ceased "strafing the Hun" when wounded and sent back to "Blighty." He tells his many and varied experiences in trench and billets in a straightforward manner—experiences just like those our United States troops are undergoing in France. This is not a book that depicts mainly the horrors of war, for the lighter side is adequately presented by this soldier boy. It is a narrative to stir the heart and kindle the imagination of the reader.

LITTLE, BROWN & CO., PUBLISHERS

34 BEACON STREET, BOSTON

A book that makes one feel the very pulse of war

LETTERS OF A CANADIAN STRETCHER BEARER

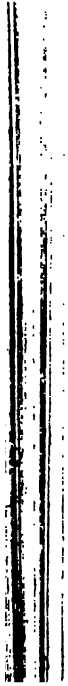
By R. A. L.

Edited by Anna Chapin Ray. 12mo. Cloth. \$1.35 net

A most remarkable set of letters from the fighting front in France, written by a Canadian soldier who possesses an unusual gift of expressing his feelings and impressions, are to be found in this new war-book. His letters, written to his wife in Ottawa, vividly describe life in an English hospital where the author was ill with rheumatic fever and had the leisure to note the changes the war was making in social relation; his experiences in base hospital work in France; his hazardous duties in the firing line; with pen pictures of life in the trenches, going under fire, and scenes after the charges and counter-charges. His last letters find him back in "Blighty." The material selected is really remarkable—far removed from the usual run of trench correspondence. The letters tell not only of momentous events, but they reveal the feeling of the writer in the midst of death and destruction. They lack egotism, they are exceedingly sane and healthy and they fairly throb with love for his wife, "of whom I don't dare let myself think too often." This book is likely to be considered one of the significant and compelling books of the war.

LITTLE, BROWN & CO., PUBLISHERS

34 BEACON STREET, BOSTON



Vertical line of text on the left side of the page.



2371

PS
3523
U63 H6

~~PS
3523
.U54.~~

PS 3523 .U63 .H6
The hope chest.

C.1

Stanford University Libraries



3 6105 036 018 112

JAN 23 1979			



